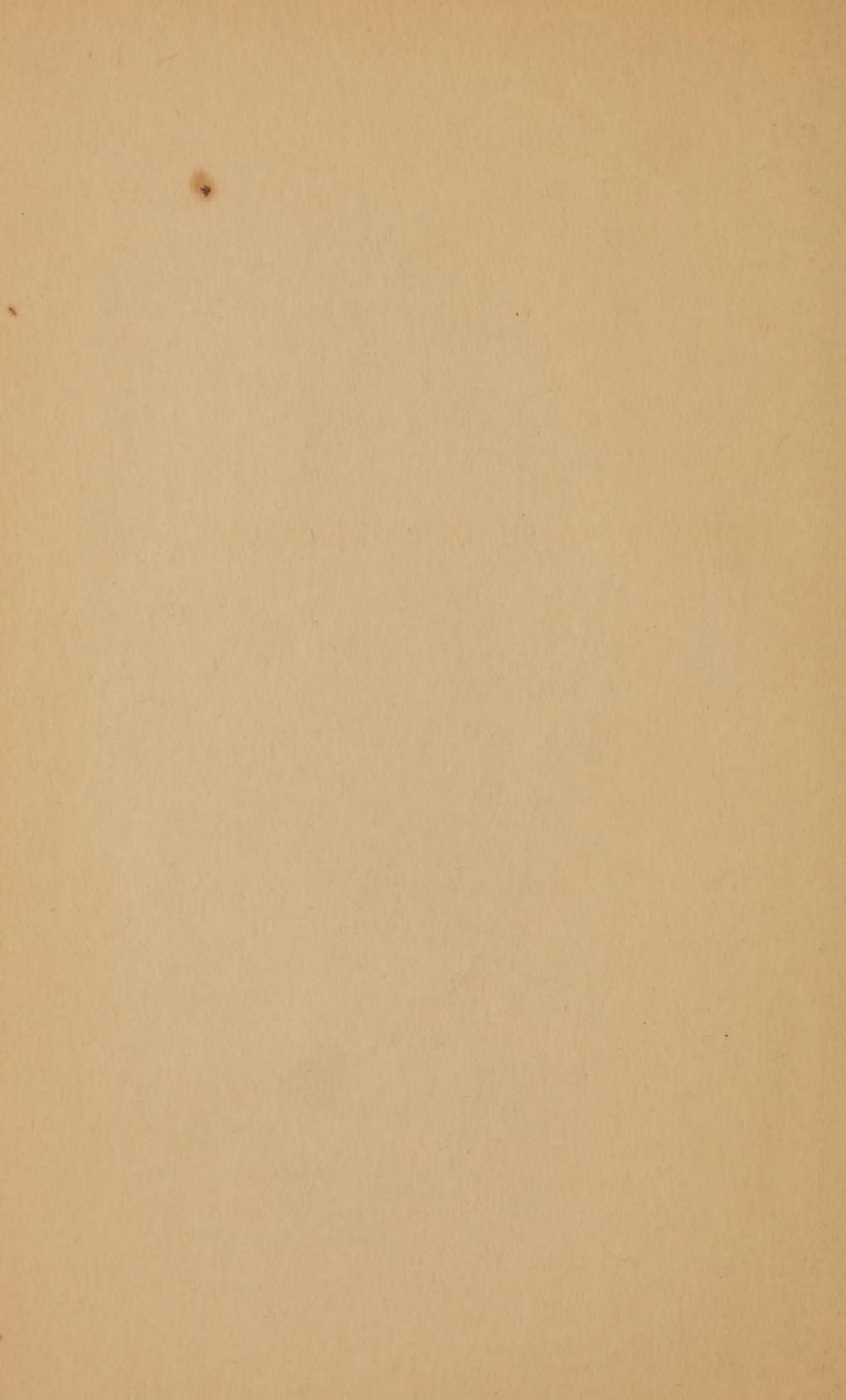


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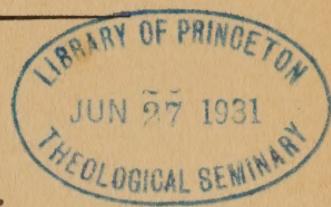




**ROBBING YOUTH OF ITS RELIGION**



J A M E S   F .   H A L L I D A Y



ROBBING  
YOUTH  
OF ITS  
RELIGION

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R E D   L A B E L   R E P R I N T S  
N E W   Y O R K

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*To the young people of America, engaged in a  
great intellectual and spiritual adventure,—  
that of breaking the shackles of the past and  
interpreting the religion of Jesus in terms of  
the spirit of a new age.*



## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

THIS book is a sort of spiritual autobiography, a record of the bewildering peregrinations of a soul. I have written it because I am convinced that my own experience is typical of that of tens of thousands of others who are finding the world of modern religious thought a trackless wilderness, and the passion of whose lives is to discover some way out. My object has been to voice the unvoiced but irrepressible convictions of increasing numbers of the younger generation.

A word of explanation is required. I have written throughout as one of the younger generation. Strictly speaking, I suppose I am no longer entitled to any such classification. Reluctantly, I am compelled to admit that, not so very long ago, I must, all unconsciously, have stepped over that shadowy, indefinable boundary line that separates youth from near-youth.

Then why the apparent discrepancy?

This is how it happened. Shortly after leaving the university, I decided to write out my own experience under the caption, "OUT OF THE WOODS." I wanted to speak the sentiments of

the younger generation and to speak them in no uncertain terms. But a number of things prevented. Fear was the big item, and fear eventually prevailed. Outline and notes were laid aside.

But the old original purpose kept crying out for expression. It refused to be silenced. It would not down. It would admit of no compromise. Somebody must say the thing that youth wants said and say it in clear, understandable language. The question became increasingly personal. Possibly a recital of my own experience might blaze a trail for others. At any rate, the day arrived when the venture would no longer be postponed.

So here, in this volume, is the outline of yesterday with yesterday's notes, revamped and amplified in the light of today's personal contacts with the younger generation. This will explain why, throughout the volume, I have identified myself with the youth of today. Particularly will it explain such a chapter as the "Revolt of Youth," which I have deemed best to reproduce, almost verbatim, from my original notes.

Evidence of late revision will be noted in the Introduction to Part II where reference is made to articles in recent numbers of *The Atlantic Monthly* and the *Outlook* and *Independent*.

This is not a book of fiction. There is a touch

of fiction in it, but only a touch. Practically the whole of it is literal, personal experience. For the sake of brevity, a few scenes have been reconstructed.

The characters are real characters. Robert Robinson, who influenced my life more profoundly than any other person, is, in a sense, composite. That is to say, in several instances I have allowed another character to speak through him.

For obvious reasons, the real names of individuals have not been divulged.

J. F. H.

*Wellfleet by the Sea,  
Cape Cod, Massachusetts,  
June 13, 1929.*



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## INTRODUCTION

A FEW years ago I was robbed of my religion. My case was not exceptional. I was only one of a great company. That company increases, is increasing amazingly at the present time. Every year, tens of thousands of young men and women are added to its ranks. Our age is an age of robberies.

These robberies, for the most part, are inevitable in a period of rapid and revolutionary transition such as ours. In some cases, they prove unmitigated calamities; in others, veritable blessings in disguise. It all depends. The reaction is what counts. Hosts of young people, by virtue of being robbed, have found their way to a stronger and more serviceable faith; hosts of others have sunk into skepticism or indifference.

This volume is the story of a traditional faith shattered and of a shattered faith restored. It represents an honest effort to deal frankly with some of the questions which youth everywhere is facing today in the matter of what to believe and what not to believe, to get back of the veneer of traditionalism to the real heart of the religion of Jesus.

At least, it states the viewpoint of a very large proportion of the younger generation—a viewpoint which cannot be ignored if the younger generation is to be understood and won over to a new and vital allegiance to the church and religion.

J. F. H.

**PART ONE**  
**A STUDY IN ROBBERIES**



# I

## ROBBERY NUMBER ONE

*Being a Course in Philosophy*

“You young people come here tied to your mother’s apron strings. Now, it’s my business to knock the pins out from under you and make you swim; and, if you can’t swim, then, damn it, you ought to drown.”

The speaker was a man of medium height, broad-shouldered, solidly built, impressive in appearance. His age—possibly forty years. Wavy black hair, shaggy eye-brows, rugged features, keen penetrating eyes, dark, very dark complexion, massive head, commanding presence, a pleasing personality when he wanted to be pleasing, a personality that sent cold shivers through his listeners when he happened to be in an ugly mood as he frequently was, a master of invective, a coiner of cutting phrases, an artist in the use of words, apparent angel or demon as you chanced to find him—that was Professor Markham, head of the Department of Philosophy in one of America’s great universities.

His first sentence that morning came like a bolt

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of lightning. It brought me up with a start. It brought some two hundred others up with a start. Professor Markham believed in bolts of lightning—anything to get the fire-works started.

Most of us were freshmen. This course was particularly designed for freshmen. It was known as Philosophy I, and was prerequisite to the numerous other courses offered. The curriculum was emphatic on that point. This course or none; Professor Markham or none. It might just as well have been that way. Had a dozen others offered the same course, John Markham would have had an absolute monopoly on the student body. "The Markham law of gravity," we used to call it. Freshmen just naturally gravitated in his direction. They couldn't help it. The pull of his personality was irresistible.

Professor Markham was known far and wide as a popular lecturer. His was almost the first name a freshman heard on the campus. "Markham magic" pervaded everything.

"Don't miss old Markham. He's the works. No flimflamming about him. Believes in treating 'em rough. Blows straight from the shoulder. Doesn't give a damn how much havoc he works. Makes more infidels than any other dozen professors in America. But you've got to hand it to him.

He's got the goods. Has the rest of the bunch skinned a mile. Get in on that first course."

The advice came from a Junior. He had taken a half-dozen of Professor Markham's courses; for two full years, had been one of that dignitary's most ardent admirers and advertisers. No matter what the subject under discussion, Professor Markham was invariably dragged in.

"Thanks for the tip," I returned.

"Get there early," continued my Junior adviser, slapping me on the shoulder. "Bound to be crowded. Hundreds shut out every year. Nothing like it on the campus. This fellow, Markham, keeps you guessing right from the start. Knocking somebody cold every day. You ought to hear the clergy gasp. Anguish terrible! Always a few of them on the back row, listening in and watching this merry old world going to the damnation bowwows. But Markham dishes them out something worth mulling over. Has most of the city preachers hot on his trail. It's worth your while to see the fire-works."

"And you?" I inquired, "what profession are you headed for?"

"Law," came the quick answer. "Six-year law. You see, it's this way. I came here, like a lot of other mollycoddles, expecting to study for the

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Christian ministry. The Christian ministry, mind you! Do you get that? And that was only two years ago. Unbelievable. The age of miracles isn't past. But say, friend, it didn't take me long to get over that pious notion. A one-semester treatment by the honorable doctor and immunity forever. This man, Markham, certainly cured me. Knocked the props right out from under me at first. Had me standing on my head most of the time. But, finally, I got squared away. AND, THANK GOD, I'M OUT OF THE MINISTRY!"

That afternoon I registered. The next morning I attended the first lecture. The opening sentence has been recorded. I left the lecture-hall feeling that something strangely new had come into my life. I wasn't sure just what it was—a grip, a personality, a challenge, surely something more than the words of the lecturer. "The Markham law of gravity" was in operation. And what a pull it had! I enjoyed the lecture. It was racy, epigrammatic, punctuated here and there with unexpected irruptions. There was a tang in what this man had to say that whetted the appetite for more. From the very start, I found myself looking forward eagerly to these morning sessions.

I had entered this university expecting to study for the Christian ministry. In fact, my mind was

fully made up. My Junior friend's verdict didn't worry me in the least. Professor Markham held no terrors for me. My underpinning was secure. All my life I had had the advantages of a Christian home. My faith was pretty well grounded, too well grounded to be knocked over by a course in philosophy. So I thought, and so I honestly believed. To me, Professor Markham was just one of those interesting characters one meets occasionally: eccentric, but not at all dangerous; keen, witty, humorous, sarcastic, sympathetic, cruel, scorching—just as the mood took him. He could say shocking things in a most shocking way. He was a firm believer in shocks. He was after reactions. And he got them. "If you want to make a man think, if you want to know how he actually feels, roil him up." That was his theory.

An odd character, this Professor Markham. There were times when I thought of him as one of the most gracious of gentlemen—kindly, considerate, painstaking, big of heart as he was big of mind. Other times when I found him cold, cruel, withering in his sarcasm, antagonistic, belligerent, going out of his way to wound the feelings of the more sensitive. Still other times when I almost believed in demoniacal possession.

And he got away with it. Somehow, he got

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away with everything. He was the most talked-of man on the campus. Double or treble the size of his class-room and it would have been crowded to capacity. Always, there were a few visitors squeezed in, some of them "spotters," keeping tab on things in general and reporting back to "ministerial headquarters." Professor Markham relished all this. The more spotters the better. The more and the louder people talked, the more did his adventurous soul rejoice. He was flattered by the attention paid him by the clergy.

Especially flattered was John Markham by the attention paid him by the clergy. Those who dropped in on his lectures to confirm their suspicions were seldom disappointed. They were treated to some of the most astounding utterances in that versatile professor's repertoire of utterances. Markham would oftentimes go out of his way to astound. He made it his business to give all the verification possible. Time and again, he upbraided the clergy for intellectual dishonesty. Himself, frank to the last degree, he found it extremely difficult to tolerate in others what he regarded as an unforgivable lack of frankness. "Truth demands fearless ambassadors. Nothing is to be gained by camouflage. A relentless facing of facts is the only way out of every intellectual

jungle." That was John Markham—the man and his method.

I recall his description of a clergyman friend of his: "The only trouble with this otherwise admirable soul was his tragic reluctance to speak out his convictions for fear of unsettling the faith of certain members of his congregation. He was a thoroughly good and amiable man, but he didn't have enough lime in the back-bone of his religion to white-wash his bald head."

I had been brought up to attend church. In fact, I can't just remember when I had not attended church. I had the habit. So, the first Sunday in this university center I attended church. An invitation was extended students to meet the minister at the close of the service. I accepted. Some fifty others did the same. The minister had the best interests of those students deeply at heart. He really wanted to be of service to them. But he did a very foolish thing that morning. He advised them, implored them, to leave Professor Markham and his courses in philosophy strictly alone. Professor Markham, he said, was a dangerous man, a destructive critic—infidel, agnostic, atheist, all in one. He had done more damage to young people than any other force in the university. "Force," he called it; and that stuck.

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"If you've registered in Philosophy I, it isn't too late to make a change. Take my advice and leave this man alone."

Foolish words! Every mother's son (and daughter) who hadn't already registered, lost no time in registering or in trying to register the next morning. Nothing like first hand information. If Professor Markham were such a live-wire as all that, why not have him.

None advertised Professor Markham more than the clergy. They made his courses extremely popular. These men had a real chance to serve hosts of intellectually and spiritually tangled students. And they turned it down. Turned it down without realizing it. Turned it down simply because they were such poor psychologists. The surest way to lure young people into doubtful territory is to put up a fence. The other side of the fence is always a source of irresistible curiosity. These ministerial fences did the business. Philosophy I increased tremendously in popularity.

The first semester went by. In these few months, we freshmen had found out a number of things. We had found out that the Bible is just as human a document as any other book, no more inspired than many of the writings of Shakespeare, and that big portions of it would never get by a

modern censor. We had found out that everything of permanent value in this book could easily be condensed into a hundred ordinary pages. We had found out that the Virgin Birth is nothing but a first century A.D. myth which a gullible humanity has swallowed whole; that the divinity of Jesus is precisely the same *in nature* as the divinity of Abraham Lincoln or of any other great and good character. We had found out that most of the miracles accredited to Jesus took place only in the imagination of a credulous generation; that the accounts of the physical resurrection of Jesus are pure and unadulterated fiction; that, from the standpoint of historicity, the Bible is hopelessly undependable. We had found out all this and more. We had found out that the Christian church has always been and is today the greatest stumbling-block to the progress of real Christianity; that if Jesus were to appear on earth he doubtless would not be able to find a church he could join conscientiously; that the ministerial profession is made up for the most part of "old women of both sexes,"—and so on *ad infinitum*.

Near the end of my first semester, I chanced one day to meet my Junior friend. He greeted me with the same old enthusiasm.

"Well, how's old Markham?" he asked, and not

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waiting for a reply, continued, "Great stuff, hey? Say, I shed more medievalism that first semester than I ever hope to shed again. Got rid of an awful lot of junk. Found my way out into a new kind of freedom. Old Markham's all right even if he is a bit rough. Makes a fellow think. Clears out the jungle. I got more real kick out of that first course of his than out of anything else I've ever taken. And, thank the good Lord, it saved me from the Christian ministry."

We talked on and on. I told him how I felt about it all; how, at first, Professor Markham had startled me, then challenged me, and then gradually convinced me. He was jubilant.

"Put her there, old man," he said, extending his hand, "I knew you'd like the old Tartar. He doesn't give a hang for conventions. Runs his old juggernaut to suit himself. Regular he-man. Ever hear him speak at a banquet? Some call it unadulterated paganism; others, the gospel for a new age. All depends on one's viewpoint. Understand Prexy himself has had a few spotters out recently. Report is, he says he'll leave the university or Markham will. If you have any money to bet, put it on Markham. By the way, what are you out for?"

"I came here," I replied almost casually, "with the idea of entering the Christian ministry."

"My God!" He gazed at me in consternation—gazed long and hard. "Well, here's wishing you all manner of luck. But listen! If you get through two semesters under Markham and stick to the ministry, I treat. If you don't stick, you treat."

"You're on," I replied.

At the end of the second semester, my Junior friend and I sat down to a royal feast.

I paid the bill.

## II

### ROBBERY NUMBER TWO

#### *Being Interviews with Certain Clergymen*

"If you can't swim, then, damn it, you ought to drown!"

There were a good many drownings that first semester. The stern logic, masterful reasoning, withering sarcasm, and sometimes ferocious attacks of this intellectual colossus known as Professor Markham were too much for the average student. The faith of the vast majority went aglimmering. A full dozen of my acquaintances headed for the Christian ministry decided on other professions. There was nothing else to do. Professor Markham had gotten in his work. And he had made a good job of it. The wreckage was appalling enough to satisfy even his inordinate philosophic greed.

What to do? The natural thing, the almost inevitable thing, was to consult one's spiritual adviser. I went to the clergyman of the church I attended. He received me cordially. I shall never forget his kindly handclasp and his quiet manner

of inspiring confidence. I knew instinctively that I could bare my heart to this fatherly man. And I did. I told him frankly my difficulties—how I had entered the university with a faith which I thought secure and how I had reached the point of utter bewilderment. He was not surprised. Scores of others had gone over with him the same difficulties. One could see that he had a passionate longing to be helpful.

When I had finished, he looked me squarely in the eye. "You're only one of a considerable company," he said, and, then, in a musing sort of way, "*a very* considerable company. I knew your story before you began. This man, Markham, is the enemy of everything good. He ought to be thrown bodily out of the university. I've never known him to advance a single constructive idea. He tears down. He never builds up. He's by all odds the most dangerous man on the campus, the most dangerous man I've known on any campus. He's wrecked the faith of hundreds, possibly thousands. Leave him alone and get back to the faith of your childhood."

"But, Dr. Thompson," I replied, "that's precisely the thing I can't do. The faith of my childhood is gone; and to tell the honest truth, I'm rather glad of it. I don't want THAT faith back

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again. I want a bigger faith and a sounder faith and a more serviceable faith. I want a faith that isn't going to be knocked into smithereens by anybody's philosophy. I've found Professor Markham a most challenging character. He forces one to think, to question, to analyze. I want to hear what he has to say. If his logic beats me out of my religion, then so much the worse for my religion. What I want to know is this: isn't it possible for me to reconstruct my faith on the basis of Professor Markham's philosophy?"

My spiritual adviser gave me a look of pained surprise. I could see that, in his judgment, I was attempting to deal with impossibles. And I felt that I could appreciate his point of view. It all looked perfectly simple to this good man. Quit philosophy and get back to one's childhood faith. Any sincere, rational individual ought to be able to do that.

I broke the embarrassing silence. "I came here, Dr. Thompson, for a definite purpose; not to have you advise me to leave a dangerous man alone, nor to have you recommend that I get back to the faith of my childhood. I came here for just one thing,—to see if you might be able to help me in the reconstruction of a shattered faith. And, if you don't mind, I'd like to ask you a few direct questions.

Just now, these questions are bothering me a lot."

"I'll be glad to answer any questions I can," he answered.

"Well, then," I went on, "I'd like to ask you, in the first place, if you believe the doctrine of the Virgin Birth."

"Most emphatically."

"Suppose a person of fine character should come to you and say, 'I want to join your church, but I can't subscribe to this doctrine of the Virgin Birth.' Would you take that person in?"

"I would say that anyone who cannot accept this great truth of Christianity would not be at all likely to seek membership in the Christian church."

"Then you regard such belief as absolutely essential to the religion of Jesus?"

"Most assuredly I do."

"Thanks. Another question bothering me is the physical resurrection of Jesus. Professor Markham contends that the religion of Jesus is independent either of belief or disbelief in the physical resurrection. How do you feel about it?"

"Why, my friend," Dr. Thompson replied in a rather agitated manner, "of course I believe in the physical resurrection of Jesus. I've never had the slightest doubt on the subject. Without a physical resurrection, what becomes of the Bible

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accounts of the empty tomb, the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus, and the conversations he had with his disciples and other friends? Is the Bible all hocus-pocus? Can't we depend on the records we find there? If not, what in the world can we depend on?"

"Then you hold that belief in the physical resurrection of Jesus is quite essential to the Christian faith?"

"Most assuredly."

"And that one is not in reality a Christian if he cannot so believe?"

"That naturally follows."

"And you could not, therefore, receive into membership in your church one who has abandoned such a belief?"

"I would not expect such a person to have any desire to unite with the Christian church."

"That's precisely what I wanted to find out. Another question, Dr. Thompson. Do you believe in the deity of Jesus; that is, do you believe that Jesus was actually God?"

"My friend," came the rather stern yet sympathetic reply, "your questions indicate that you've been switched entirely off the track. It's nothing to be surprised at in the light of Professor Markham's teachings. I've seen hundreds in the same

predicament you're in, hundreds who have been literally robbed of their religion. I've seen them trying to find substitutes for the faith they've lost, but I've never known them to get hold of any at all satisfactory. The Christian faith is the Christian faith. There are no substitutes. I cannot conceive how any Christian could possibly question the deity of Jesus."

"Then you regard belief in Jesus' deity as quite indispensable to the Christian religion?"

"Yes, I regard it as absolutely indispensable. Either Jesus was God incarnate in the flesh or he was the basest of impostors. You might as well throw the whole Bible overboard as to throw out this cardinal doctrine. The New Testament is perfectly clear on that point."

"And if a person were honestly trying to live out the spirit of Jesus' life but could not accept this doctrine, you would keep him out of the Christian church?"

"I have no hesitation in answering 'Yes' to your question. Tear down this doctrine and you tear the very heart out of the religion of Jesus. The deity of Jesus is established beyond any possible doubt. I cannot conceive how anyone can reject this noble doctrine and still claim to be a Christian."

"Just one other question," I returned. "The recorded miracles of Jesus,—do you accept them as historically true?"

"Certainly I do."

"All of them?"

"All of them."

"And do you regard belief in the historicity of these miracles essential to the Christian faith?"

My spiritual adviser was beginning to show signs of impatience, and yet, after all, it was a kindly sort of impatience. "See here, my friend," he answered, "you're floundering around in a great sea of unbelief, just plain unbelief. The faith you had has been needlessly shattered. You're looking for substitutes. Let me say again,—**THERE ARE NONE.** Take my advice. Leave substitutes alone. Stop trying to reason everything out. Just make up your mind to believe as you once believed. **BELIEVE**, even if you can't explain everything you believe. And you'll soon find your difficulties vanishing. 'Believe' is a word that requires mighty emphasis these days. 'Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.' "

"It follows, then, that you could not receive into membership in your church any person, however noble and Christlike his character, who might find it impossible to accept as historical the gospel accounts of the miracles of Jesus?"

"You have been supposing impossible cases," came the prompt answer. "People who have discarded the fundamentals of the Christian religion are not seeking membership in the church. People of that sort prefer to be outside the church and, in my opinion, that's where they belong."

"But don't you imagine there are hosts of people—good people, right-thinking people, high-souled people—who are not joining the church these days simply because of intellectual barriers which the church has raised; people who regard themselves as Christians and honestly strive to practice the teachings and the spirit of Jesus?"

"Possibly, but I've never come across them," replied Dr. Thompson. "The religion of Jesus and a philosophy like Professor Markham's simply don't mix. The Christian faith is so simple and reasonable that any sincere person ought to have no difficulty in accepting it. Not everything can be reasoned out and demonstrated as one might reason out and demonstrate a problem in mathematics. The mind has its very definite limitations. A great many things have to be taken on faith. Where reason stops, faith takes up the venture."

We shook hands, my spiritual adviser and I. I felt that I had already trespassed too far on both his time and his religious convictions. As I turned to leave, he stepped to the other side of his library

and gathered up three huge volumes written by some eminent divine in the year 1875. "Here," he said, "read these. An honest perusal of these books will give you back your faith. Try it."

That night I made the following notations in my diary: "Called this evening on the Rev. Dr. Thompson. Told him everything. Found him very agreeable, patient, and apparently anxious to be of assistance. His advice impossible. Regards all creeds, doctrines and dogmas of the Christian church as absolutely indispensable. Doesn't seem to know just why but takes it for granted. Prefer Markham."

I had gone to Dr. Thompson in a maze of bewilderment and given him a chance to help me reconstruct some kind of faith. He had turned it down. Turned it down without even knowing it. The help he offered was only a hindrance. My big problem,—the possibility of a new faith constructed on an altogether different basis—was just as far from solution as ever. When it came to philosophy, at least the Markham type of philosophy, Dr. Thompson recommended the hermetically sealed mind. I was in a quandary.

More and more, as time went on, I had become convinced that Professor Markham was right in his views, and, strange to say, the Rev. Dr. Thompson

had unwittingly confirmed that conviction. But what was to become of my religion? New convictions kept clashing with old ideas, many of them sacred ideas associated with my earliest memories. Always the same old question kept repeating itself over and over in my mind,—“Is there any possibility of accepting Professor Markham’s conclusions, and having a religion; and, if so, would it be the religion of Jesus?” Well, why not? What is the religion of Jesus anyway? But just a minute,—if Professor Markham were right, then all the clergy of my acquaintance must be dead wrong. That didn’t sound very reasonable. In those days, I had yet to make contact with a broad, constructive liberalism. For perilous weeks and months, I fought out my intellectual and spiritual battles. And the more I battled on, the farther I seemed from getting anywhere. If only I might find a kindred mind and a kindred soul. Surely plenty of people had gone through this same experience. But where to find them? At last, in utter confusion, I decided to consult another clergyman.

The Rev. Dr. Whiting, a scholarly gentleman and as gracious a soul as one may ever hope to meet, gave me a full hour’s conference. Result? The same disappointing experience. This second

Doctor of Divinity informed me that he was more deeply grieved than he could possibly say to hear of my loss of faith. He thought there ought to be some way of ridding the university of a man like Professor Markham. He had already written out a series of charges which he intended to present to the clergy of the city at the next Ministerial Meeting. If adopted, these resolutions would go before the President of the University and the Board of Directors.

I went over with him the points I had taken up with my own minister. Their views tallied exactly. "Our generation is science-mad, and philosophy-mad. A more irreligious generation never was. The faith of people is being torn to shreds. Science and religion are, and always will be, implacable enemies. Religion is a matter of faith rather than of reason, etc., etc., etc., etc."

For one whole hour—one wholly lost hour—I conversed with this man whose business is to preach and practice the religion of the Master, and I left him feeling that, in his opinion at least, I was utterly lost and undone. I was struggling desperately to reconstruct my shattered faith.

He had nothing to offer me but impossible advice.

That night I added the following lines to my

diary: "Just called on Dr. Whiting. Most disappointing interview. Found him a blue-blooded conservative. Can it be that all ministers believe as these two believe?"

I was nearing the end of my second semester. The faith I had brought with me to the university was by this time a twisted and hopeless mass of wreckage. And I had found no faith to take its place. Professor Markham was my beau ideal of what a professor ought to be—keen, logical, incisive, racy at times, at other times ponderous, shrewd, analytical, fearless, venturing out into new realms, careless of consequences. And always gripping.

I had reached two decisions. First—if I could not enter the Christian ministry without accepting the creeds, doctrines, and dogmas which all the ministers I then knew accepted, I'd stay out. So much for that. Secondly—if I could find some way out of my intellectual muddle, some way of holding fast to the new and keeping all that was essential in the old, then nothing under heaven could keep me out.

On the last day of that first college year, I made the following note in my faithful diary: "Given up the ministry. No possible chance in that profession for a fellow of my views."

### III

#### ROBBERY NUMBER THREE

*Being the Teachings of a Christian Home*

“IF you can’t swim, then, damn it, you ought to drown.”

I had thought many times during that freshman year of Professor Markham’s introductory sentence. At first, it struck me as a rather crude effort to be funny, to call a laugh from the crowd, to say something startling and with a vigorous jolt in it, to whet the appetite of the curious and to keep everybody on the tiptoe of expectancy.

As time went on, I began to realize the more serious aspects of the situation. It dawned on me gradually that Professor Markham was not joking. He had made his threat in dead earnest and was carrying it out most effectually. His philosophy was his religion; and there was plenty of passion as well as intellect in that religion. He was not “knocking out pins” just for the sake of knocking them out. It was simply his way of getting rid of “a lot of supernatural moonshine.” He was sincere in everything he said, desperately

sincere. His convictions were deep-seated. He honestly felt that he was rendering these students of his a real service in helping them relegate to oblivion a lot of "religious bunk." He was one of those daring adventurers ready to take big chances to reach his goal and to reach it quickly. He could not for the life of him understand why any worth-while individual could not see the situation as he saw it and reconstruct for himself a better faith than the one he had lost. The havoc he wrought was of small moment compared with the goal he had in mind. That was one estimate I had formed of this man by the end of my first year.

But I had formed another estimate. In his approach to every subject and in his manner of dealing with it, Professor Markham seemed to me unnecessarily destructive. He left his students to sink or swim. And he never once thought of throwing out a life-line. If only he had been halfway approachable. If only his personality had invited conferences. If only he had offered some little assistance in building up a new structure after he had razed the old structure to the ground. But that was not Professor Markham. It would have been a courageous student indeed who would have asked a conference with him.

A strange character, this professor. He could throw a magic spell over an audience and have everybody straining to catch the faintest syllable. But he could not draw people to him as one is drawn to a friend. Possibly he did not want to. I have never been quite clear on that point. At any rate, he appeared to take no one into his confidence. His students stood in fear and awe of him. He conquered by sheer force of intellect and personality.

One year under Professor Markham and my religious faith was a thing of the past. That such could actually be would have seemed to me inconceivable at the beginning of that first semester. I had no idea that my Junior friend's prophecy would be fulfilled. But fulfilled it was. I was not an atheist, I was not an infidel, I was not an agnostic. I was simply a young man without a religion. Not because I wanted to be without a religion, but because I was compelled to be. But why had Professor Markham been able to rob me in this fashion? And why had the Doctors of Divinity I had consulted been able to rob me all over again? What was the matter with my religion anyway? Finally, one day, it flashed into my mind that the difficulty was not altogether with Professor Markham and with the clergymen. It went

deeper than that. It took me back to my childhood's home.

*A Christian home had first robbed me of my religion.*

In a Christian home, I had been taught to believe all these impossible doctrines and dogmas which now I could no longer believe, to accept as indispensable to the religion of Jesus ideas which now—religion or no religion—I found it necessary to throw into the discard. In a Christian home, I had been trained in all these conceptions which for a year Professor Markham had been toppling to the ground. A Christian home, a genuinely Christian home, had first robbed me of my religion; or, if not quite that, had paved the way to inevitable robbery later on. Had a Christian home not given me these irrational ideas in the first place, Professor Markham would not have had the chance of tearing my faith to pieces. With a reluctance that was almost rebellion, I began to feel that a Christian home had committed the first robbery, that the church was responsible for the second, and that Professor Markham had simply done over again, in his own bludgeoning fashion, what the others had done before him.

*A Christian home had first robbed me of my religion.*

The idea came to me with a jolt. I put it away. With that sort of suggestion I would have nothing to do. But, despite my best efforts, the idea persisted. It challenged attention. It demanded consideration.

I loved that home of my childhood. It was the kind of home anyone might be proud of. I thought of my father and mother and how devoutly religious they were. Theirs was a faith to ride every tempest. But the tempests they encountered were not the kind of tempests I had encountered. There were no Professor Markhams in their lives. Science had not disturbed them in the least. What they could not reason out, they accepted on faith. They did precisely what my spiritual adviser had counseled me to do—they BELIEVED. From beginning to end, the Bible to them was “God’s Holy Word.” Therein was to be found his complete and final revelation to mankind. Every word in this Book had a spiritual message if only one knew how to find it. It was not a Book to be questioned in any particular.

The creeds and doctrines and dogmas of the church, they had accepted in the same unquestioning way. The Apostles’ Creed to them was just as sacred and authentic as any of the sayings of Jesus.

The theology of the Middle Ages needed no revision. Men of God had spoken as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. So believed my father and my mother. Wonderful Christians, despite their inherited theology! In their judgment, everything in any way pertaining to the religious life was forever fixed and settled. One must find his way to God by the light of the past. The Almighty no longer spoke to men as he had done in ancient days. The way of salvation was perfectly clear—repentance, conversion, regeneration—all according to a prescribed formula.

Again and yet again, I went over the religious experiences of my childhood. There was the church school, taught by literally minded teachers none of whom apparently had ever come in contact with a modern idea. Even as a child, I used to wonder about some of those Old Testament stories—great stories, most of them, but occasionally calling for a mighty stretch of the imagination. And yet I never once thought of baring my doubts to those teachers, nor of talking them over with my parents. That was the tragedy of it. At home, we talked over everything under the sun except religion. Religion was taken for granted. In the church school, we talked only of religion, and there it

was taken for granted that religion is a fixed and definite something which has been handed down intact through the centuries.

The church was strictly in line with the home and the church school. The minister was a literalist. He spoke as one having authority. No one seemed to question his pronouncements.

Revivals played a considerable rôle in the church of my childhood. Those revivals still seem like a hideous nightmare. At the age of twelve—that was supposed to be about the proper time—I went to one of them and tried desperately hard to be converted. The evangelist was an adept in playing upon the fears and emotions of his hearers. I was led to believe that by virtue of the very nature given me I was an outcast from the family of God, a sinner who, should I die in my sins, would find myself immediately in eternal torment. I was told that the only thing for me to do was to “hit the trail” and have my sins “washed away by the blood of Jesus.”

I hit the trail and the experience was tragically disappointing. I didn’t get the “feelings” I had expected to get. I didn’t feel like getting up from my repentant knees and shouting for joy as many of the other trail-hitters did. I began to think there must be something radically wrong

with my make-up. I explained to the evangelist that I didn't seem to get the right feeling and he replied that possibly I hadn't "laid everything upon the altar." So I tried again and yet again. But the "feelings" didn't come. However, to my way of thinking, I had done my level best to square accounts with God. If God wanted to condemn me because I didn't have the right "feelings," it wasn't my fault.

The evangelist had me sign a card which said— "I accept Jesus Christ as my Saviour and promise to follow him." Every trail-hitter signed one of these cards. I joined the church. Practically all trail-hitters joined. But even after I had become a full-fledged member, my "feelings" were about what they were before the revival had taken place.

In the course of time, I convinced myself that I was actually a Christian—possibly a somewhat irregular one, but a Christian none the less. I tried to say a few words in public. Occasionally I led the young people's meetings. I sang with the young people of how "Jesus paid it all." Now and then, I offered a faltering prayer in public. And the more I did these things, the more firmly I became convinced that, regular or irregular, I was in truth a Christian. The next few years strengthened my convictions on this point.

Then one day—I was about seventeen years of age—I announced to my parents that I had decided to study for the Christian ministry. They were overjoyed. Nothing, they said, could possibly afford them greater satisfaction than to have a son in the ministry. The minister of our church was equally elated and enthusiastic over my decision.

Altogether, I felt that I was making fairly good progress. I was a senior in the High School and looking forward eagerly to college and after that to the seminary. My faith seemed impregnable.

I had my doubts and questionings to be sure, but they were not particularly alarming. I was aglow with religious passion. I was to go forth to proclaim the good news to my own generation.

But I had never heard of "Philosophy I."

I had not come under the dominating mind and personality of a Professor Markham.

In a year's time, my religious faith had crashed into a thousand pieces, and I was out of the ministry forever.

John Markham had robbed me of my religion.

But was John Markham, after all, the chief robber? What about those robberies committed by the clergy, and that other altogether unconscious robbery committed by a Christian home?

## IV

### WHERE ROBBERIES HAVE THEIR ADVANTAGES

My second year found me registered in several more of Professor Markham's courses. Not having been able to decide definitely on another profession, I had determined to continue in the Department of Liberal Arts. My profession could wait. It would have to wait. Meanwhile, I would be having a good time wading around in philosophical lore, exploring all kinds of forbidden regions, and experiencing all the thrills of the newly emancipated. It even occurred to me that possibly a kindly fate might eventually land me in a Chair of Philosophy in some university.

Professor Markham continued to weave his magic spell. I could smile now over those first rude shocks which his bold utterances had given me. I could do more than smile. I could actually laugh over my once dense stupidity. My fears had vanished. My turmoil of soul was at an end. Professor Markham might say anything he cared to say. I was immune. I was impervious to shocks. I had thrown to the four winds every religious idea I had inherited. I was ready for new

pronouncements, however radical. In fact, the more radical these new pronouncements, the more I relished them. I was convinced that the theology of Christendom ought to be knocked into a cocked hat; that the clergy ought to be shown up as the groveling slaves of medievalism; that, if youth were losing its interest in religion, plenty of good reasons might be found walking about in frock coats and high collars.

“Intoxication” is the only word to express it. I was intoxicated with Professor Markham’s views. No other courses ever gave me half the thrill. Here was a man dealing with questions which youth wanted to know about, and dealing with them in regular man-fashion. The ministers of the city kept up an active opposition. How they did advertise Philosophy I and all those other courses! Petition after petition was laid before the President, praying that, in the interests of youth and the morals and morale of the community, Professor Markham be removed from the Chair of Philosophy. And still youth continued to abandon the churches and flock to Professor Markham’s lectures. The petitions availed nothing. The sway of the Professor’s magic was evidently not confined to the student body.

One course, in particular, “The Philosophy of

Religion," captivated me completely. In this, Professor Markham was at his best. His superb powers of invective, his daring denunciations, his scorching criticisms, the contempt he poured on "drivellers in a by-gone religion," his slashing phrases, his implied challenge to his critics to do their worst, his clear, concise, unanswerable arguments—it was nothing short of amazing, stupendous. Here was a man speaking out of his heart of hearts and out of the ever-deepening convictions of a lifetime, a man who had come to regard himself as an evangel to a new age. The passion of the reformer and the daring courage of the martyr were in those lectures. He made no mental reservations, he would sanction no compromises, he asked no quarter. His business, he declared, was "to tear the mask from a conventionalized religion and give at least a few people a fleeting glimpse of the mind and heart and spirit of Jesus."

I had never listened to such scathing indictments of "the good, old-fashioned religion," "a religion," Professor Markham declared, "so radically different from the religion of Jesus that Jesus himself would never recognize it, much less subscribe to it; so hedged about with rites and ceremonies and restrictions and prohibitions and all manner of petty regulations as to rob its devotee of his

inherent and inalienable right to think his own thoughts, to form his own convictions, and to live his own life. Away with this sort of pious demagoguery! It has in it nothing of the spirit of the new age, no single virtue to commend it to the consideration of any rational man or woman."

Here are just a few memory snatches from those lectures—not the exact words of the lecturer, but an exact record of the indelible impress his words made upon me: "Theologians have taken the greatest, the noblest, the divinest character in the history of the race and made of him an impossible myth. They have taken the loftiest teachings that ever fell from human lips and transformed them into meaningless jumbles of Christless dogmas. They have abandoned Jesus for a creature of their own imagination, and then have had the brazen effrontery to ask people to accept this imagined creature as the incarnation of the living God. Their disservice to humanity is beyond computation. And the tragic thing about this whole dismal, grotesque, heart-rending situation is that ministers of the gospel, educated in our modern universities, have thrown reason to the winds and swallowed this irksome mass of twaddle,—hook, line and sinker. A more gullible body of literati, it would be difficult to imagine. And these chained

and cringing slaves of medievalism, as medieval as medievalism itself, as ancient as the most ancient of the ancients, proclaim themselves the prophets of our generation, the teachers and propounders of God's eternal truths. That is blasphemy with a vengeance. Is it any wonder that the churches of America and of the world are increasingly deserted, that youth is throwing overboard a hopelessly conventionalized religion and is seeking light and spiritual guidance from other quarters? The most desperate need of Christendom today is a reformation that will rock the existing order from center to circumference and bury in the debris a theology so obsolete that it can no longer serve a single useful purpose and, with this theology, those theologians and clergy who insist on perpetuating it.

"I believe with all my heart and mind and soul, with all the passion of my nature, in Jesus of Nazareth. In mental qualifications, in spiritual insight, in character achievement, in personality, in clear, lucid, unanswerable teachings, I place this Galilean head and shoulders above any other character the race of men has produced. Mankind has had many saviours, but he is the Saviour of saviours. Given a fair chance and he would command the heart, the conscience, and the allegiance of humanity. But our creed-shackled theologians

have never given him half a chance. Instead, they have crucified anew this Christ whom they profess to serve, wrapped his body in the grave-clothes of outrageous dogmas, and waited vainly for a resurrection that will never come. They have asked people to accept, and still they ask people to accept, as fundamental to the Christian religion and to the Christian faith, creeds and dogmas which Jesus never heard of, never dreamed of, and which he would be the first to repudiate. They have turned a glorious religion into an absurdity, ignoring almost completely the spirit which makes that religion great, and brought treacherous dishonor to a cause entitled to the finest loyalty of the noblest souls."

That was the nearest I had ever heard Professor Markham come to anything like construction. It was the first time I had heard him make a confession of religious faith and acknowledge allegiance to the Galilean. The more I saw of this unconventional, belligerent character the more I found myself thinking,—“What endless service this man might render his generation if he were only a builder.” As I look back over those courses now, I can see how he might very easily have led hosts of students out into a broader, deeper and more glorious religious experience. They were clay in

the potter's hands. And the potter! How immeasurable his privileges and responsibilities!

Professor Markham must have constructed a faith for himself. But he never once offered that faith to those whom he had robbed of their faith. Just a few constructive ideas, and light would have dawned in many a desolate heart. But, no. That was not Professor Markham. This colossus of the campus appeared to me at times a veritable intellectual demon, driving and lashing his helpless victims pell-mell to the edge of a mighty precipice; then hurling them headlong into the yawning abyss below. One would think that occasionally he might have repented the havoc he had wrought and attempted a rescue. He must have known the anguish in the hearts of some of those students. But rescues were not in his line. His mission was to destroy. He would leave to each individual the task of doing his own constructing. A faith worth having is a faith worth fashioning.

The second year ended. And for the vast majority of those who had sat under Professor Markham's instruction, new students and old, the ruin was complete. Some rejoiced in it. They had been freed from the galling shackles of the dead past. Others bitterly regretted it. Something very essential seemed to have gone out of their lives.

A comparatively few held on, convinced that, however logical and irresistible this man's reasoning, there must have been flaws in his premises.

A few days, and they were scattered to every state in the Union. I went that summer to the Middle West where I had secured a "summer job." I needed the money and I needed the chance to do a lot of serious thinking on my own account. The choice of a profession was giving me the deepest concern. By the end of the next year, at the latest, my decision must be made.

. . . . .  
A car drew up in front of my rooming-house. I was waiting in eager anticipation. Friends had invited me to a motor jaunt in the country. It was a Sunday morning, and rather early—one of those glorious days when even the most tuneless person just can't help being in tune with the universe; gorgeous landscapes, whole fields of wild-flowers, occasionally a mile or two of arching elms that made the road we traveled a great royal avenue of glory, singing birds, babbling brooks, breezes laden with the incense of forest and field, deep blue skies with only the slightest tracings here and there of clouds, the whole of nature joining in a great symphony of joy and praise.

It was late morning when we passed a little

white chapel, standing well back from the highway on a slight rise of ground, the half acre in front of it shaded by tall, wide-spreading maples. Automobiles were parked on three sides. Evidently some people still were old-fashioned enough to believe in church services. Our car came to a sudden dead stop.

"Let's go to church," said my host.

"Why not?" chimed in his wife from the back seat.

"And why not?" echoed the others.

We parked our car and entered, five of us, and were ushered to a pew. Perhaps a hundred people were in the congregation. The last stanza of the hymn before the sermon was being sung. The organ was wheezy, the members of the choir ranged in years from seven to seventy, there were plenty of discords in the music; but everybody, choir and congregation, sang with a verve and gusto magnanimously disdainful of flaws. There was something truly contagious in that singing. For more than a year, I had not been inside a church and I confess it felt rather good to be back again, even though I knew I would not be able to agree with a single line of the sermon.

The hymn finished, the minister announced his text: "He that doeth the will of my Father shall know of the doctrine." I found myself imme-

diately fascinated. We were all fascinated. One couldn't help being fascinated. All unexpectedly, we had come into the presence of a most fascinating character. Tall, straight, and of rather slight build; a rugged face lined with rugged furrows; snow-white hair, as heavy and luxuriant as that of youth, brushed back from high temples; eyes, dark and deep and penetrating; a voice finely modulated; a strange light that fairly glowed in the countenance,—here was a personality that would have captivated any audience, country-bred or city-bred. Had I then known about this man the things I came to know a few years later, I would not have been quite so puzzled and mystified.

I shall always remember the impressive pause following the announcement of the text, a pause that riveted every eye upon the speaker. The sermon was particularly adapted to young people and, as I glanced about me, I noted that in this congregation young people seemed to predominate. If only I had had a pad and pencil with me. I asked the minister afterward for a copy of that sermon. He replied that he never wrote out his sermons. Some good philanthropist should have provided him a stenographer. A sermon such as I heard that morning ought never to be lost. It was a clear, concise exposition of the fundamentals of Christianity, and as profound as it was simple.

Everything except fundamentals was ignored. The speaker dealt with big questions and dealt with them in a big way; and yet it all seemed so perfectly simple. If Professor Markham was an expert in destruction, this man was an expert in construction.

I listened throughout with almost breathless interest. The final sentence brought me up with a start: "My friends, and more particularly my young friends, there may come times when your faith will be grievously tried, when questionings and perplexities and misgivings will assail you on every hand, when you may find it necessary to discard some of your once cherished beliefs; times, even, when you may come to doubt the validity of your religious experience. I have been over that road and I know how rough a road it is in spots. And out of my own experience I want to give you a bit of simple advice. You may think it too simple even to deserve mention. But it has held me to my course as nothing else could possibly have done. My advice is this: Keep in mind that religion and theology are not one and the same. Theology changes. The spirit of the religion of Jesus never changes. Intellectual assent to creeds and dogmas is no criterion of Christian character. What counts is *spiritual assent* to the life and philosophy of the Master. The Christian is the person who honestly

tries to live out the spirit and the teachings of Jesus. Nothing more. Nothing less."

I left that simple country chapel in a state of sheer joy and excitement. Our party of five motored on. Throughout the afternoon, we discussed nothing but the sermon we had heard. Evening came and I found myself alone, going over and over again every word I could recall. The last sentence I wrote out carefully. All suddenly and unexpectedly, I had been ushered into a great new universe. Joy, throbbing joy, had taken the place of depression. I knew that I would never again be assailed by the harrowing doubts that for two years now had robbed me of my peace of mind, nor by the fears and questionings and unbelief which had forced me to give up a profession which, even in my most despondent moments, I had longed to enter. The way ahead was clear and straight and luminous.

*"The Christian is the person who honestly tries to live out the spirit and the teachings of Jesus. Nothing more. Nothing less."*

The most important pronouncement I had ever heard,—a clear-cut distinction between religion and theology.

I had lost my faith in a university class-room.  
I had found it again in a country chapel.

V

A REFRESHING CASE OF INTELLECTUAL  
HONESTY

"If the people of my congregation actually knew what I believe—my attitude toward the creeds and dogmas of the church—I'd get my walking papers before night."

The speaker was a young clergyman whose acquaintance I had formed toward the close of my second collegiate year and only a few weeks prior to the events described in the last chapter. I had met him by chance. A mutual friend had introduced us. He was back at his Alma Mater for a fraternity meet. Informed that I had once intended studying for the ministry, he invited me to his room. He was eight years out—three in the seminary and five in a pastorate. He might, he said, be able to give me a few interesting "tips" out of his own experience.

"You're a lucky dog," he began, as we settled down into our comfortable lounging chairs, "luckier than you have any idea of. My advice to any young fellow these days would be—**STAY OUT OF THE MINISTRY.** It's the one profession without a

future, a veritable graveyard of hopes and ambitions. But I fully deserve every knock that's coming to me. I went into this thing with my eyes wide open; went into it, mind you, after taking every course old Markham gives. Thought I had the genius to spring some of his theories on an unsuspecting generation; but it can't be done, old man. It simply can't be done. The young people won't listen to the old stuff and their elders who hold the shekels won't stand for the new. A fellow is forever between the devil and the deep sea. I tried out a few stunts in the way of doctrinal education when I first started in, but, believe me, I wasn't long in giving up that idea. A committee of white-haired veterans called on me the next morning to advise me that no heterodoxy would be tolerated in the minister who presided over their spiritual interests. One was the chairman of the board of trustees who pays half my salary, another was the senior deacon whose reputation for 'soundness' and extreme piety is widespread, and the other three were lesser lights in our little spiritual firmament.

"Well, it was a simple case of shut-up or quit. I couldn't quit for no other church would be open to a man dismissed on grounds of heresy. Besides, I had married and had a home to provide

for. So, after several violent tussles with myself, I decided to restrict my future pulpit efforts to non-doctrinal sermons. That's what I've been doing for five years now. Giving them stuff that wouldn't cause an eye-brow to lift in suspicion. But it's crucifixion, old man. God, how I'd like to be honest! Again, I say, congratulations."

"I'm glad to hear you say it," I replied earnestly. "That's about the way I had it figured out. But my figuring isn't much to bank on. I'm nearly as badly off as the fellow who prayed, 'O God, if there is a God; save my soul if I have a soul.' Even if I had any faith left, which I haven't, I couldn't see where a fellow of my way of thinking would have the ghost of a chance in the pulpit."

"Not a chance," came the half-sneering answer, "not the ghost of a shadow of a chance. Most of these old fossils who hold the money-bags haven't done any thinking on their own account for a generation. And they don't propose to do any. They simply believe in the faith once and for all delivered to the saints. The faith delivered to the saints. Bah! What is this faith and who are the saints? Believe me, they haven't the glimmer of an idea. They are literalists from A to Z. They profess to believe the Bible from cover to cover, but what most of them haven't read between those

covers would make a volume very much the size of the original. They are simply dried-up traditionalists. Their religion is a hand-me-down affair, good enough for father, good enough for mother, good enough for Aunt Jane and Uncle Bill, and good enough for me.

"A man with any ideas of his own had best steer clear of the ministerial profession. If I were back ten years, nothing on God's earth could persuade me to go into it. But when a fellow is trained for one thing, and for just one thing, what can he do? Life insurance or stocks and bonds. Those are about the only alternatives. Professor Markham has the thing sized up right so far as theology is concerned, but even a man with the magic personality of a Markham couldn't put his ideas across in the pulpit. The old fogies simply wouldn't stand for it. I tell you that a big percentage of the clergy today are intellectually dishonest. They're in the same fix I'm in. If they could speak their thoughts, there'd be a religious revolution by tomorrow night that would make the Protestant Reformation look like a Quaker prayer meeting. But there's no danger of a revolution. The moneybags rule!"

We conversed for a couple of hours that evening, my new acquaintance and I, and I left him feel-

ing that he had rendered me a real service. How barely had I missed the dismal fate that was his. Of course, he had not saved me from it, but he had fortified me in my own convictions. I went home rejoicing. I had seen the inside of a modern minister's heart.

That was only a few weeks prior to my visit to the country chapel and the sermon I heard there by the Rev. Robert Robinson. And, now, everything was changed again. It seemed to me as if I had been going through an eternal series of revolutions. Now up, now down, now neither up nor down. But at last I was sure of myself, sure so far as my religious faith was concerned. I was by no means sure, however, about the advisability of entering the profession of the Christian ministry. I still felt that the friend I had met that night in the fraternity house was dead right in his verdict. My ideas simply wouldn't fit into the present order of things. If I couldn't speak out what I actually believed, then I wouldn't speak at all.

No muzzled profession for me.

The next Sunday morning found me again at the country chapel, and each succeeding Sunday morning for the next month and a half. And, more than that, each Sunday afternoon found me in Dr. Robinson's library conversing earnestly with him

over my problems. I would not exchange a whole seminary course for those half-dozen Sundays.

I told him frankly I did not believe that half the ministers, regardless of denomination, are intellectually honest; that I did not see how they could be intellectually honest and hold their jobs.

"That all depends on what you mean by intellectual honesty," he replied. "If you mean that a minister is to speak out bluntly and boldly, right from the start, convictions which he has arrived at only by arduous years of study and investigation, then I'd say that real intellectual honesty is out of the question. But, even if such a thing were possible, would that be the best way? There is a law of nature called 'Evolution.' Progress takes place in accordance with that law. Time seems to be no consideration. The patience of the natural universe is marvelous. A million years are but as a day. There is likewise a law of *human* nature called 'Evolution.' Human nature makes its most permanent progress in accordance with that law. Why attempt to bring people by revolution to the position you have reached by evolution? Why compel people to go through the tragic experience which you say you have gone through when you can lead them to the same goal without any unnecessary shocks? And evolution demands patience."

"But how is one to bring people to a scientific way of thinking on religious questions without a reasonable number of shocks?" I asked.

"Constructive preaching," came the prompt answer, "constructive preaching. Change people's theological thinking gradually. Don't try to do it all on the instant. You will have to tear down, of course. Medieval theology will never do for these times. Tear down where you must, but at the same time build. Every time you pull out an old timber put a new one in its place. Destruction is necessary; construction is even more necessary. What people really want, and desperately need, is a positive message. Get the confidence of your people. Let them know and feel that their interests are your interests. Establish between yourself and them a bond of understanding. When that is done, your ideas will not seem one half so revolutionary. Even though some may not agree with you at first in all your conclusions, they will be thinking of the man behind the message rather than of the theologian. But don't try to accomplish the whole thing at a single jump. I have perfect liberty in my pulpit today. Fifteen years ago I had to tread carefully. It was irksome at times, fearfully irksome. I used to long to speak right out, regardless of consequences. Revolution takes so much less time than evolution. But that would have been

sheer nonsense. It's entirely different now. My people know me; they understand me; I have, I am confident, their love and devoted loyalty. They've come to feel that I am honestly trying to live out the spirit of Jesus. And that's the big thing with them. I've had the joy of leading them step by step to what I regard as a broad, sane, liberal, and thoroughly constructive way of thinking. There have been a few jolts to be sure, but nothing of a very damaging nature."

I was sure, however, that this quiet-mannered Christian gentleman hadn't sized the situation up properly; he couldn't have understood my real convictions. So I proceeded to state with utter frankness precisely what I believed as to creeds and dogmas, and likewise what I did not believe.

"I've already told you, Dr. Robinson, of the effect that first sermon of yours had on me. It straightened me out in a jiffy and to the end of my life I shall be more grateful to you than I can possibly say. I have a real faith now and it's getting stronger and clearer every day. But that isn't just the point with me. I'm choosing a profession for life. I wonder if you understand just how liberal I am."

"Well, how liberal are you?" he returned.

Here was my opportunity to let loose and to find

out whether, in this man's judgment, the Christian ministry was a possibility for me. And how I did let loose. Right from the start, I gave him the most liberal and heretical of all my views. I held back nothing. I informed him frankly that I had abandoned the old theology completely. Not a trace of it was left in my system. He listened patiently. A knowing smile occasionally lighted up his face. Apparently he understood. But did he understand? Had I really made myself clear?

"I'm glad to find a kindred spirit," he replied calmly when I had finished. "Yes, I'm mighty glad to find a kindred spirit. You've gone through precisely what I've gone through. And we've arrived at about the same conclusions only perhaps you're not quite as liberal as I. But, given time and your liberalism will develop. Evolution will do for you what it's done for me. And then these questions that have been disturbing you, and that still are disturbing you, will seem so simple,—so very, very simple."

To say that I was surprised is putting it mildly. I was overwhelmed. I was shocked beyond words. The shock was even greater than Professor Markham gave me on the occasion of our first meeting. Surely this man had not grasped the situation. Oh, for words to make it all clear! So I went on

stating even more emphatically what seemed to me my rather extreme views. On many a mooted question, I bore down with all the might at my command.

"There," I said, in conclusion, "do you think there's a place in the Christian ministry for a man with ideas like those?"

"I've already said," he answered in his usual quiet manner, "that in the course of time you will come to very much broader views, broader and more constructive. As to whether there is a place in the Christian ministry for a man like you, I would say that it all depends on the type of man you are. Your views are not even a consideration. If you have judgment, tact, patience, and, above all, if you have a passionate love for your fellow-men, then the Christian ministry is just the profession for you. If you haven't these qualifications, then you'd best stay out."

"You've been thinking along lines of revolution. Revolution will never get you anywhere. But evolution will accomplish the seemingly impossible. Can't you see, my friend, that the church of today must be dominated by the thought of today, and that one big reason why multitudes are not concerned with the church is because the church is so oftentimes not concerned with anything mod-

ern? The theology of a prescientific age will never do for an age dominated by the spirit of science. All this talk about a conflict between religion and science is just so much nonsense. Intelligent people don't talk that way. The only conflict is between science and a prescientific theology. The two simply don't hook up together. Your business is to restate fundamental religious truths in terms of the thought and spirit of a new age. It's a big job and, sometimes, a tedious job. It calls for ingenuity and an almost endless amount of tact. But it can be done, must be done, and is being done. I'm doing it. Others are doing it. The process is slow to be sure. As yet we are only in the beginnings. But a reformation is on,—a reformation that will bring our generation back to the real Jesus of Nazareth; and, through him, out into the RECOGNIZED presence of the living God.

"You're fortunate in having gone as far as you have. You're farther along than I was at your age. If your temperamental make-up is what I've indicated, I'd not only advise you—I'd urge you—to take up the Christian ministry as your life work. And, my friend, it's a glorious profession, with compensations altogether out of proportion to services rendered. Think of the challenge to restate these dogmas we've been talking about in terms that will

be acceptable to the best minds of these marvelously new times. Is there any adventure equal to that?

"Jesus, despite the gross misinterpretations placed upon his teachings, is the dominant personality in the world today. Our civilization cannot endure without him. Your business is to make him still more real, still more inevitable and irresistible in the life of this generation. No other mission is comparable with that. Multitudes today are without a substantial religious faith. They have been torn from their old moorings. They are adrift upon an unknown sea with neither chart nor compass. You are to come to their rescue. You are to assist them to reestablish themselves in a faith a thousand-fold more satisfactory than the faith they have abandoned. Can you do it? Are you big enough to tackle the job? Are you built along constructive lines? Have you the patience and courage to wait years to say to your people what you would like to say today? If so, then by all means go into the ministry. If not, then by all means stay out."

I had never run across this kind of spiritual counselor. He took me completely by surprise. He refused to be disturbed by anything I had to say. He only urged me to go on and get still

broader conceptions,—“develop my radicalism,” as he put it.

“And do your people know just where you stand on the subjects we’ve been discussing?” I asked in a half-apologetic tone of voice.

“Yes,” he replied, “perfectly. But it’s taken fifteen years to reach this state of understanding. Don’t forget that.”

Much more might be recorded of these delightful and, to me at least, invigorating conversations.

Before the summer was over, I had begun to think of myself as very much of a conservative,—I, who, a couple of months before, had been such a pronounced liberal.

It was a big find,—that country chapel and the minister who presided over the spiritual interests of that community. Here, in this out-of-the-way place, I had come across what I had never been able to find in a university center,—a clergyman who knew how to put across a modern message to a modern world. More than that, I had found a minister who was *intellectually honest*. A wonderful find!

A few weeks after our last interview I was back in college.

I had definitely decided to become a Christian minister.

## VI

### THE REVOLT OF YOUTH

THE revolt of youth. One hears about it everywhere. Is it just a fiction or is it a living reality?

Is youth actually in revolt against a theology which the Christian church, for the most part, rigidly adheres to? And, if so, is there anything alarming in the situation?

The older generation has written volumes on the subject. The younger generation has had little opportunity to voice its convictions. As a representative of this younger generation, I shall try to state, with all possible frankness, the viewpoint of youth.\*

Go to almost any church and count the number of young people in the congregation. The figures are appalling. Youth is conspicuous for its absence. Ninety per cent of the average congregation, and that is a conservative estimate, are well beyond the age of twenty-five. Youth is represented by the other ten per cent,—more often it is five per cent or less. Evidently, from the standpoint of church attendance, something is

\* Original notes. Cf. explanation in "Author's Preface."

radically wrong. If youth is turning from the church, it must have its more or less valid reasons. The signs of a changed attitude are not local; they are universal. For some time now, the older generation has been asking: "What's wrong with the attitude of the younger generation?" In turn, the younger generation is now asking: "May there possibly be something wrong with the attitude of the older generation?"

Tens of thousands of young men and women are going through much the same experience I went through during my first two collegiate years. Not all of these young men and women, by any means, are college students. They are everywhere—in high schools, in Christian homes, in non-Christian homes, in offices, in stores, in factories, everywhere. Not all have traveled the same road to their present dilemma, but they have arrived. They are without any definite religious faith. For one reason or another, they have become apathetic, disinterested, out of gear with things religious in general.

All manner of explanations have been offered. Some say that science is causing most of the havoc—science that has saturated our age with the spirit of observation, inquiry, and questioning. Others declare that the fundamental cause is lack of

proper religious instruction in the home—a lack almost inevitable, we are told, in a decidedly materialistic age. Still others declare that back of this widespread religious unrest is the new type of youth which the times have developed, the type that stresses independence, unconventionalism, and rebellion. But, whatever the reason or reasons, almost everybody is agreed that the revolt of youth is not a mere fiction. It is not just a passing phase of normal development. It is a fact as hard and fast as any fact of life, and it has in it all the elements of permanency. Something has happened.\*

I shall endeavor, if only in a limping, faltering way, to indicate what that something is; to present the case of youth as youth sees it. To those who are much older than I and whose peculiar mission it is to be the spiritual counselors and guides, not alone of youth but of all classes of people, what I have to say may appear unwarranted and presumptuous. Be that as it may. For these feeble efforts of mine, I offer no apologies. I believe the time has come when youth should have a hearing. I believe the hour has struck for youth to say, candidly and unafraid, what, in its judgment, is the

\* The situation today, so far as youth is concerned, is even more acute than a few years back, since vastly greater numbers have been caught up by the spirit of the new age.

matter in the present religious crisis—not because it feels that it has the wisdom to set everything straight, but because it does feel, and feel tremendously, that it has the right to present its own case.\*

Is youth lacking in spirituality? Quite the contrary. In all probability, there has never been a time when youth has been more tenaciously and aggressively spiritual than at the present moment. The hidden potentialities are all there waiting for expression. But they must find expression, not in the world and in the spirit of yesterday, but in the world and in the spirit of today.

Youth is not a lover of tradition for tradition's sake. It refuses to be run into the thought-molds and the conduct-molds of former generations. Simply because people have always believed a thing is no reason, from youth's point of view, why youth should believe it. You may call this a case of exaggerated egotism, or unwarrantable independence, or what you will. Names are of small consequence. The fact remains. Youth is no longer inclined to bow down and make obeisance simply because that is the conventional thing to do. Imaginative, adventurous, dominated by an irresistible passion for self-expression, it is demanding

\* Original notes. Cf. "Author's Preface."

its place in the sun. It wants to live its own life free from what it regards as unnecessary and irrational restrictions. It is not averse to leadership. It welcomes leadership. But leadership, to command the allegiance of youth, must lead somewhere, and that somewhere is towards a future which emancipates rather than towards a past which enslaves.

Spirituality, as youth sees it, is not a matter of adherence to conventions and traditions and yesterday's way of doing things. In the vast majority of churches, that seems to be the one crucial test. People are received into membership on the basis of intellectual assent to creeds and dogmas. The big item, SPIRITUAL ASSENT, is passed by as only a minor consideration. If I can assent to the Apostles' Creed and a few other "essential" dogmas, I get in. If I cannot so assent, *and am honest enough to say so*, I stay out. In either case, my spiritual qualifications or lack of spiritual qualifications are taken for granted.

Youth revolts against this sort of attitude. It is not vitally concerned with the creeds and dogmas of generations past. It believes that spirituality is preeminently a matter of spirit tuning itself with the infinite spirit of the universe, confident that in every adventure into new realms it will find a

dependable guiding presence. Make no mistake about it, you who deplore the attitude of the younger generation as respects the church—youth is waiting for the church to release the shackles of the dead past and to manifest at least some slight appreciation of the viewpoint of youth. Until that is done, it will leave the church increasingly alone. It will find an outlet for its pent spirituality in other directions.

Another consideration of vital significance—<sup>(2)</sup> youth, necessarily, is living in an age saturated with the spirit of science. The spirit of science is the spirit of inquiry, research, investigation, analysis, questioning. Nothing is taken for granted. The worth of every theory must be demonstrated. But that is not the spirit of the church. Where its time-honored dogmas are concerned, it wants no inquiry, no research, no investigation, no analysis, no questioning. Everything is to be taken for granted. The worth of every theory has already been demonstrated. The case is closed. Woe unto him who would lay violent hands upon the things that are sacred.

Against any such dogmatic and untenable attitude, youth revolts. It wants its own faith, not a faith of, by, and for the past. If the faith of the past has in it essential and abiding elements, youth

is only too glad to accept these elements and to build them into its own faith. But it does not propose to have a whole mass of dogmas crammed down its throat simply because, from time immemorial, that has been the conventional thing to do. If blind intellectual assent to dogmas is the only way of getting into the church, then youth prefers to stay out. **AND YOUTH IS STAYING OUT.** It cannot understand why the church should be so fearful lest its cherished dogmas be destroyed by the spirit of the new age. If these dogmas embody great and eternal truths, they are bound to stand. If not, then they ought to fall. In either case, there is nothing to fear. That is how youth feels about it. And isn't youth justified in taking this attitude?

The younger generation has heard a good deal about "the conflict between science and religion"; so much, in fact, that it has come to feel that possibly there is a conflict. And where did this idea come from? Surely not from the younger generation. Youth has never insisted upon the necessity of choosing between science and religion. Youth cannot justly be charged with responsibility for the prevalence of the utterly foolish idea that the acceptance of the one means inevitably the rejection of the other. That idea has been thrust upon

it. It can see no reason why science and religion should not be staunch allies rather than implacable enemies. But if, despite its own inclinations, it be compelled to make a choice, it is prepared to do so. And the choice will be science. No doubt on that score. The viewpoint of science is necessarily the viewpoint of youth.

Science, as the younger generation conceives it, stands for truths which have been demonstrated or which are in the process of being demonstrated. Science stands for honest, fearless investigation. Science is not afraid of having its theories shattered. The more shattering the better. The objective is worth the price. Science is headed towards a bigger and more wonderful future; not towards a narrow, restricted, and stationary past. If the conflict be inevitable, if either science or religion must be thrown into the discard, then religion will be the one to go. That is how youth is thinking.

Of course, anybody who has given the subject even casual consideration knows there can be no conflict between the truths of science and the truths of religion. Truth does not conflict with truth. How, then, account for this deep-seated conviction of an irreconcilable conflict? The answer is perfectly simple—people have taken for truth a great

many things which are not truth, *and with these things which are not truth, science is forever in conflict.* They have taken for truth the dogma of an infallible Bible, and science has shattered this dogma into a thousand pieces. They have taken for truth the dogma of the Virgin Birth, and this dogma science has altogether discredited. They have taken for truth the dogma of the deity of Jesus—the dogma that Jesus is very God—and science has made this dogma appear increasingly impossible. They have taken for truth the historicity of all the miracles of Jesus, as well as all the miracles of the Old Testament, and science has demonstrated the vast majority of these to be fictitious. They have taken for truth a veritable host of things which manifestly are not truth; and, because science has been and must forever be in conflict with these things, they have assumed that science is in conflict with religion. The tragic thing about it is that many of the younger generation have accepted this assumption as correct and, in consequence, have made an altogether unnecessary and disastrous choice. They have abandoned religion for science. The fact that this revolt, for the most part, is unvoiced, makes it no less real. Oftentimes, the unvoiced, smouldering protest goes the deepest.

The revolt of youth is not a sudden and spectacular manifestation. It has come on gradually. It comes on gradually in the lives of all young people. It is a cumulative process. Its beginnings may be traced to present-day psychology or lack of psychology in religious instruction—its beginnings and its endings. Signs of it usually appear before boys and girls are in their teens. During the teen age, these signs increase with amazing rapidity. Before the teen age is over, the revolt is on in earnest.

As an example of bad psychology, take the instruction given in the average Bible School. It is difficult to imagine how it could be much more out of line with the spirit of youth. Exceptions there are to be sure; and fortunately these exceptions are becoming more numerous. There lies the hope of the future.

As a boy, I often wished that I might have a picture of the individual or group of individuals who got up the lesson quarterlies I had to study. I was convinced they must be old people, very old people; men, doubtless, with long, flowing beards like the patriarchs of ancient times; skin, parched and wrinkled; faces, serious and with never the suggestion of a smile; hoary old men who had forgotten that they ever had a youth of their own.

I used to think that I would like to be on a lesson quarterly committee with a bunch of other fellows I knew. We'd have an altogether different kind of quarterly. We'd get up something with a kick in it,—something to make people sit up and take notice. I haven't quite recovered from that feeling yet.

Fairly good psychology has been used, as a rule, in the kindergarten, primary, and even in the junior grades; bad psychology, for the most part, in the intermediate and senior grades. The ominous results are apparent in practically every church. The dwindling process begins with the intermediate grades and increases steadily through the higher grades until finally the vanishing point is reached. Bad psychology, of course, is not alone responsible for this deplorable situation. Other factors enter in. But bad psychology must be charged with a big share of the responsibility.

I have in mind some of those dreary sessions I was compelled to sit through when I wanted above all else to ask questions which, for the life of me, I dared not ask. How those sessions might have been enlivened by spicy, youthful questionnaires!

I am thinking of some of those tedious lessons about the Ark of the Covenant, about Abraham and Moses, and Isaac and Rebecca, about Jonah's

gourd and Balaam's ass, about the axe-head that floated and the sun and moon that stood still—about all manner of things which didn't appear to me, even in those youthful days, as particularly edifying. The older I grew, the more I wanted to ask questions. But something inside told me that my questions would be ruled out of order.

I wanted to know, not merely the alleged facts recorded in the first chapter of Genesis; I wanted to know if they really were facts or just fiction. I wanted to know, not just the account of the parting of the Red Sea; I wanted to know if the Red Sea actually did part. I wanted to know, not simply the full and complete story of the experiences of the adventurous Jonah; I wanted to know who got up that yarn, and why so many people fell for it. But I never advanced any opinions of my own. I felt instinctively that such an attitude would be regarded by my elders as sacrilegious, and so I passed it up.

I found in the Bible School I attended no invitation, no incentive to self-expression, except as that expression might be couched in conventional forms. I enjoyed the fellowship of friends and teachers, and that was no small asset; but the Bible for me became one of the most irksome of all irksome books, filled with happenings that could never

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happen in the world in which I lived. I got the idea that the Bible belonged to an entirely different age than the age that is here and now, an age when fiction was recorded as fact, and whose impossible happenings the present generation was asked to accept simply because they were to be found in the Bible. That sort of logic didn't appeal to me in the least. It doesn't appeal to the younger generation generally.

The use of a reasonable amount of good, wholesome psychology in the Bible School, together with sound, rational instruction, would save the situation for many a youth. If only youth's elders would talk about the things which youth wants to talk about and would be perfectly frank in their discussions. "But the faith of youth might be disturbed." Twaddle! The faith of youth is waiting to be saved.

The same bad psychology is evident in most of the programs provided for young people's religious services. These programs are not youth's programs. They may be better than the programs youth could prepare, though personally I do not believe it. But that is not the point. They are not youth's programs. They are not saturated with youth's buoyant, inquisitive, up-and-doing spirit. They are the programs of youth's elders. They do

not invite youth to express its own convictions, to discuss questions which it is tremendously interested in discussing, to face problems which, in this modern world, it is compelled to face.

How vivid the memories of those young people's services I used to attend! Boys and girls, in the unnatural intellectual and spiritual garb of maturity, struggling to feel and act like grown-ups. Youngsters doing their dismal and reluctant best to get something out of subjects in which they could have no conceivable interest, and all the time watching the clock for the hour of joyous release. The pathetic figure of the leader, embarrassed, dejected, too downcast over the profound and disconcerting silences to look anywhere but in the direction of the floor. This leader imploring somebody to "just say something."

One is compelled to marvel at the sacrificial patience of youth.

And there is oftentimes bad psychology in the services of public worship; bad psychology, if youth is to be won to allegiance to the church. Seldom do the sermons one hears deal with questions that are agitating the mind of youth. They are good sermons, most of them, and helpful, no doubt, to many who hear them. But they are not youth's sermons. I went Sunday after Sunday

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that first year at the university hoping to hear a sermon that would answer some of my questions—and I went in vain. Doubtless scores of others did the same. In the end, I felt that my only hope of assistance lay in private conferences. I arranged a few. The disappointing results I have already narrated.

Youth wants the truth. It is not afraid of being shocked. It craves honest, fearless discussion. It is determined to think its own thoughts and to grapple with its own problems even though it has to do it alone and unaided. It has the will to succeed. It will battle its way through. It may take a generation or so to get out of the present jumble. But in youth is the spirit of the conqueror. Every defeat is a challenge to greater effort; every failure, the prophecy of future victory.

One might think that youthless churches would point the way to what is wrong in the present situation.

Apparently not. None are so blind as those who refuse to see.

It is not enough to ask: "What's wrong with the attitude of the younger generation?"

The younger generation is incurably religious. It passionately wants a religious faith. It doesn't want to be robbed. But it is in a quandary.

Good, rational psychology would go far to save the day.

A larger co-operation on the part of the clergy in sermons and in private interviews would be a mighty lift.

A greater confidence in the ability of youth to think straight and to work out its own salvation would help a bit,—possibly a bit more than the older generation realizes.

And there is yet another invaluable aid. Saturate the mind and soul of youth with this living, unassailable truth: "*The Christian is the person who honestly tries to live out the spirit and the teachings of Jesus. Nothing more. Nothing less.*"



PART TWO  
A STUDY IN YOUTH'S REACTION



## INSIDE THE MIND OF YOUTH

### BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION

THE younger generation is being robbed of its religious faith. That fact is too evident to require argument. Who the real robbers are is not quite so evident to many people. The conservative looks askance at the liberal and charges him with committing the robberies. The liberal, on the other hand, is just as thoroughly convinced that the robberies are being committed by the conservative.

My own experience forces me to conclude that the liberal is right in his judgment. It was strictly orthodox Christians who robbed me of my faith by insisting that I must adhere rigidly to antiquated dogmas, prescientific concepts and outworn cosmogonies. This made inevitable the disastrous results of destructive criticism later on. It was the liberal, whose teachings are in line with the thought and spirit of a scientific age, who gave me back my faith and, in giving it back, multiplied its worth a thousand-fold.

*If youth is being robbed of its religion, it is vitally important to understand who are committing the robberies.*

It is likewise vitally important to understand that the revolt of youth is a living reality. With many people, it has been quite the fashion to declare that the younger generation is not greatly concerned over questions of creed and dogma. This, in my opinion, is an altogether erroneous and fatal judgment. The younger generation *is* interested in these matters, tremendously interested. It is literally compelled to face the issues of creed and dogma and to decide, as best it may, what is the truth and what is not the truth. There is no possible escape.

Before me is a recent issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*. In it, I find several letters from members of the younger generation. A Methodist young man in the Middle West, who signs himself, "H. H. W.," writes as follows: "If the church really wishes to appeal to younger men and women, by all means throw out all the 'hokum.' Here, we have our religion presented to us as based on fundamental nonentities—views of the Bible which no intelligent man can accept, coupled with attacks on all whose views are different. Why not give us an honest view of the Old Testament, with clear teaching and its evolution of thought and the gradual growth of a better conception of God? Then make the teachings of Christ the only basis

of appeal. Trust us, and allow us to renew our faith in ourselves and in humanity with confidence in our ability at least to strive to live after the pattern of the man, Jesus." \*

That, in my judgment, accurately voices the protest and the appeal of youth. "Hokum," "fundamental nonentities," "views of the Bible which no intelligent man can accept"—there you have the bold, bald, indignant protest; a protest seldom voiced, but none the less real, earnest, and destined to become irresistible. But keep in mind the appeal. It is just as vigorous and passionate as the protest—"give us an honest view of the Old Testament," "make the teachings of Christ the only basis of appeal," "trust us, and allow us to renew our faith in ourselves and in humanity, with confidence in our ability at least to strive to live after the pattern of the man, Jesus."

That is what youth is after, and that is what youth is determined to have—a theology that squares with the modern, scientific point of view; a religion that gets down to the fundamental teaching of Jesus; a church that makes the bringing of life and life more abundant its all-absorbing mission. If only our clergy and theologians would make an honest effort to get inside the mind of

\* *The Atlantic Monthly*, August, 1928.

youth! To be sure, in many instances there would be speedy and shocking disillusionment, but sooner or later the disillusionment must come. Why not now?

The younger generation is thinking, and thinking seriously, on questions of theology and religion and life. It longs for the coming of the day when its opinions will not be quite so generally brushed aside as of no great consequence.

Youth is determined to fashion for itself a living faith.

An encouraging sign of the times is a brief editorial in a recent issue of the *Outlook* on "Theological Barnacles." I quote only a few sentences: "There are any number of explanations why formal religion does not appeal to the younger generation. One of the commonest is that the churches have clung to creeds and practices which the churches themselves no longer believe. . . . When the church rids itself of these obsolete inheritances, a younger generation, with its lack of patience for dishonesty, and its contempt for the excrescences of traditionalism, may find itself at home within church walls." \*

That is the kind of pronouncement that brings to youth a genuine thrill. All the younger genera-

\* *Outlook and Independent*, September 12, 1928.

tion asks is a fair and impartial hearing, a frank consideration of conclusions it has been compelled to reach, and a sympathetic co-operation.

The following chapters represent an honest effort to get inside the mind of youth, to voice the convictions of youth on some of the dogmas and practices of the Christian church, and to stress the fact that young people, in ever-increasing numbers, are coming to feel that, whatever one's creeds and doctrines, "*the Christian is the person who honestly tries to live out the spirit and the teachings of Jesus. Nothing more. Nothing less.*"

# I

## AN ANCIENT MYTH EXPLODED

"THE Virgin Birth is so manifestly a myth that one marvels why Christian people, in a scientific age like ours, cling to it as an essential dogma of the religion of Jesus. It has nothing whatever to do with the religion of Jesus."

It was that first course, Philosophy I. Professor Markham was speaking. I had already received several jolts, but this jolt was the jolliest of all. It left me in a daze—a sort of intellectual stupor. Just why, it is difficult for me now to understand. But the catastrophic effort upon me of this pronouncement, I shall never forget. It seemed to me that my religious faith just then was like a house of cards which all suddenly had come tumbling down about me. One of the big foundation stones had been knocked out by a single blow.

One of the big foundation stones. But why one of the big foundation stones? I had no idea why. I only knew that a bewildering sense of loss had swept over me. Something big, vital, tremendously essential had been wrested from me. In

fact, at that crucial moment, it appeared to me that my whole faith hinged on that one single belief. Strange in the light of the faith that is mine today. Anything but strange as I saw it then.

I have thought many times since that bewildering moment that I must have been a good deal like old Timothy Jones of Faraday. An infidel had come to Faraday to lecture and Jones decided to hear him. Jones was one of those "sound in the faith of the fathers." Many times in the mid-week services of his church he had said that he accepted "the whole Bible from cover to cover." "God," he was fond of declaring, "had dictated it and inspired men had simply acted as stenographers."

In the course of his lecture, this infidel said a good many apparently shocking things, and Jones found his righteous indignation mounting higher with every utterance. The climax for Jones came when the infidel, in his most serious and challenging tone of voice, declared: "I tell you there is not one single word of truth in that book of the Bible called 'Hezekiah.' "

This was altogether too much for Jones. In a flash, he was on his feet, his face purple with rage, his breath coming in short gasps. Shaking an angry fist at the speaker, he shouted: "And I want to tell you, Mr. Infidel, that every single word in

that blessed book is God's own truth. Destroy that book and you destroy my faith and the faith of millions." To which, after quiet had been restored, the infidel calmly replied: "Well, Sir, then I'm awfully sorry for your faith, for it so happens there is no such book in the Bible."

I was very much in Jones' frame of mind. Whatever appeared to me an attack on anything sacred —even though there were nothing sacred about it —set me wobbling. I recall how, one day, Professor Markham brusquely informed us that Moses, most assuredly, did not write the whole of the Pentateuch. The very fact that Professor Markham made this statement, and made it in such a blunt, threatening way, immediately aroused my suspicions and resentment. What difference it made to my faith or to anybody's faith whether or not Moses had written the whole of the Pentateuch, I could not have told. I only felt that a sacred and long established religious belief was being attacked. Later, when I discovered that the Pentateuch contains an account of Moses' own death and funeral, I concluded that Professor Markham was right.

It was a good deal that way with this dogma of the Virgin Birth. The Virgin Birth was one of those inherited beliefs whose origin and value I

had never thought of inquiring into. I didn't suppose there was any inquiring to be done. Why inquire whether the sun shines when you can see it shine or whether the wind blows when you can feel it blow? Some things call for no inquiry. To my mind, the Virgin Birth was one of these. Here was a "truth" which generations of men had accepted and most surely believed. Why go inquiring into it at this late date? To me, even though I could not say just why, it was a veritable foundation stone, the Gibraltar of my faith, against which every tempest must beat in vain.

I did not realize at that time that, even in the gospel records, there is not the slightest suggestion that Jesus ever referred to it, ever heard of it, or ever dreamed of it. And, surely, had it been so important an element in the religion he established, he would at least have made some mention of it. But, in all his recorded utterances, there is not a reference to his own Virgin Birth. A rather striking fact when one considers the stress which theologians have laid upon this dogma and the zeal with which the church has defended it.

Nor, at that time, had it impressed me as anything at all significant that two of the gospel writers, the earliest and the latest, make no reference whatever in their biographies of Jesus to the

Virgin Birth. Not a single word in Mark, and not a single word in John. Truly, a serious and unaccountable omission had these men heard about it, accepted it, or attached to it the slightest significance.

Neither had I been struck by the quite apparent mythical character of the accounts given by Matthew and Luke, the only gospel writers who make mention of the Virgin Birth. Matthew tells the story of the wise men from the East—astrologers and members of the ancient order of the Magi—who follow a guiding star to the manger in Bethlehem. Luke relates how the announcement is made by an angel of the Lord to shepherds watching their flocks by night; and how this same angel is suddenly joined by a multitude of the heavenly host in a great chorus of praise and rejoicing. The shepherds confer together and hurry away to Bethlehem where they find the Christ child lying in a manger.

Now, anyone who has tried to follow a star to any particular spot knows the unlikelihood of the first account. And anyone who believes that the laws of the natural universe have been in operation from the beginning cannot very consistently accept the second. Astrology and angelology belong to the past, not to the twentieth century. Neither

of these accounts necessarily nullifies the other, but both are so manifestly creations of the imagination that anybody who gives the matter serious thought should have no difficulty in evaluating them at their true worth.

I had not, at that time, paid much attention to the genealogical tables of Matthew and Luke. In fact, I doubt if it had ever dawned on me that both these writers trace the lineage of Jesus through the line of Joseph, the one to Abraham and the other still farther back to Adam. But, if Joseph were not the father of Jesus, then these genealogical tables, in reality, have nothing whatever to do with the ancestry of Jesus. They might as well have been left out. They simply trace the ancestry of one who was the husband of one who became the mother of Jesus.

And I was not familiar enough with the writings of Paul to know that this greatest of all interpreters of the gospel of Jesus and, next to Jesus, the most powerful and living character in our modern world, never so much as mentions the Virgin Birth in any of his letters. To say nothing of staking his own faith upon it, or insisting that Christians accept it as a vital creed in their faith, he nowhere even hints at such an idea. Probably no man ever went deeper into the religion of Jesus

than he, and certainly no man ever more truly embodied in his own life the spirit of the Master. Yet, on this "fundamental" doctrine, Paul has not a word to say. Had he heard of it, accepted it, or attached to it any religious significance whatever, then he may justly be charged with gross and criminal negligence.

I had not thought very much on these subjects up to the time I registered in Professor Markham's course, Philosophy I. I had simply taken the dogmas of the church for granted. Had I known more about them, my reaction, naturally, would have been different. I would not have felt that the underpinning of my faith was being knocked away. I would not have suffered a spiritual shock from which I was a long time in recovering. As it was, the loss of a dogma which I had taken as a sacred and fundamental historic fact set me spinning. Had Professor Markham been not quite so blunt or had he gone into the matter the least bit constructively, I might have been spared many an hour of spiritual turmoil. But Professor Markham was Professor Markham. He would demolish; you could do your own constructing. I can appreciate perhaps better today than a few years ago the methods of this old iron-master, but I have never ceased to regret that he was not as big and

successful in building as in demolishing. His intellectual powers were so magnificent. His personality so gripping. He might have done such marvelous things for those students of his.

Of course, it is all perfectly clear to me now. The dogma of the Virgin Birth no longer gives me the slightest concern. It plays no rôle whatever in my religious faith. In my opinion, there is no reason for believing in its authenticity. The evidence is all against it.

But that is not the whole of the story. I still find in this ancient dogma much of genuine value. This value has nothing whatever to do with historicity. It lies in the sentiments of love and veneration that throbbed in the hearts of those simple people who created it. The accounts of the Virgin Birth as given by Matthew and Luke are two of the simplest, deepest, and most compelling tributes to the power and influence of Jesus that ever welled up out of human hearts. To my way of thinking, they are the finest of all tributes. And why?

Well, one has only to dip into Greek and Roman mythology—writings, many of them, contemporary with the gospels or at least belonging to the same general period—to discover that the ideas of “virgin births” and of “divine procreation” are by no

means peculiar to the gospels. Scores of personages, according to those old mythological accounts, were begotten of gods, and some were born of virgins. The ideas are perfectly natural ones. Powers and abilities so unusual as to defy explanation by any human standards of measurement required explanation by superhuman standards. Hence the phrases, "born of a virgin," "begotten of a god," or "begotten of God." Not otherwise, it seemed, could the highest expression of character, personality, and power be accounted for. This fiction came to be one of the finest conceivable tributes. It was only another way of saying: "Here is one so far beyond ordinary mortals that his origin must have been different from the origin of other people. In attributes, and abilities, and achievements, he is so godlike that a god must, in reality, be his father."

We, today, might use column after column in paying tributes to greatness, but even our finest tributes would not compare in effectiveness with that simple tribute of ancient times—"He was begotten of God; he was born of a virgin." The people who said that about Jesus had said everything that could be said. They had lifted him above all other mortals and clothed him with a power and majesty which belong to God alone.

That Jesus could so have impressed his own generation is one of the best possible evidences of his godlikeness. The dogma of the Virgin Birth witnesses, and will ever witness, to the spiritual supremacy of Jesus.

That is what this dogma, so long argued over and so divisive, means to me today. That is doubtless what it means to thousands of Christian people everywhere. Then why not say it? Why be afraid of disturbing somebody's religious faith? Why not think rather of saving a faith that already has been disturbed? Of all things needed in a modern pulpit, constructive courage is one of the first and foremost. Youth demands intellectual honesty. It wants explanations that are really explanations. It wants a religion that science, instead of destroying, will fortify.

Who is to come to its rescue?

The answer is clearly up to the clergy.

## II

### AN IMPOSSIBLE THEORY DISCARDED

"THE Christian religion is made up of a mass of impossible dogmas, and one of the most impossible of these impossibles is the Deity of Jesus."

I recall as though it were only yesterday the effect which this staggering pronouncement had upon me. I could actually feel myself wilt. Few days went by that Professor Markham did not stagger somebody,—everybody for that matter. And little wonder. The majority of us were freshmen who had come out of conservative homes and conservative churches where questions of this nature had never been raised.

The Deity of Jesus? Why, of course, I believed in the Deity of Jesus. Didn't everybody believe in the Deity of Jesus? Wasn't the Deity of Jesus one of those absolutely fundamental and essential dogmas of the Christian faith?

That was about my state of mind when Professor Markham, with all the passion of his fiery and passionate nature, launched an attack upon this "sacred" dogma. Only a week or two before, he

had thrown into the scrap-heap the dogma of the Virgin Birth. Was anything to be saved from that ever-mounting scrap-heap of his? My mental apparatus seemed all out of gear. The tempest had begun to rage. The old anchors were beginning to give a little. Black and ominous storm-clouds were looming up in the distance. What was it all about anyway? Where had I been for the first eighteen years of my life? Was everybody in the world wrong except Professor Markham? I say "everybody in the world except Professor Markham" because that is how it appeared to me at that particular moment. I had taken for granted that religious faith is a very fixed and definite something—that everybody most surely believes in the "great fundamentals." And here was a man, whose sheer boldness was captivating, declaring these fundamentals "manifest myths" and "impossibles."

Why hadn't the ministers back home had something to say about it? If one couldn't believe dogmas that had the sanction of centuries, then what could one believe? Could one be sure of anything? That was my initial reaction. And that is very much the initial reaction of youth everywhere.

My first really big contact with modernism in religion did not come until I had entered the uni-

versity and taken up Philosophy I. That, however, is no longer the case with the majority of young people. A few years have wrought a very decided change. The shattering process begins earlier. It is in full operation outside the university. Our magazines are full of it. Our religious periodicals are full of it. Even our modern dailies have come to consider it "good news."

Before me, as I write, lie several popular magazines and church periodicals picked up at random. One contains an article by a southern editor on "Why I Do Not Go To Church" and a little further on an article by one of America's well-known and beloved poets on "Why I Go To Church." In another, a noted scientist discusses the subject, "Can Religion Survive in an Age of Science?" And in still another an eminent divine, under the caption "Whither Are We Drifting?" makes a rather disconsolate and backward-looking diagnosis of the present situation.

When popular magazines, weekly periodicals, church papers and even the dailies are filled with discussions of this sort, youth no longer has to await the university for contacts with modernism. These contacts are everywhere. There is no escaping them. And youth doesn't want to escape them. On the contrary, it is on the lookout for them. The

very atmosphere it breathes is charged with the spirit of inquiry, analysis, questioning. The only place where these vital questions are not being discussed, where one is reasonably certain not to establish any contacts whatever with the spirit of the age, is the average pulpit. And that is one big reason why youth is quitting the church.

Six days of the week, the younger generation lives in a world thoroughly modern in every respect; and, on the seventh day, it is plunged back into medievalism, if the average church be taken as a criterion. Six days of the week, it reads articles which suggest that a mighty revolution in religious thought is going on and then, on the seventh day, it discovers not the slightest indication of any such revolution. The younger generation wonders why.

Whatever contribution the church is making to our generation, and, despite every shortcoming, its contribution is big and genuine, one thing is sure—youth is not finding in the average church what it wants to find. It is not finding answers to questions which, to its way of thinking, demand answers. And yet Christian people and, among them, the great majority of Christian ministers marvel that the church is not gripping more effectually the younger generation. The reason is per-

fectly clear. It is because youth is living in one world and the church in another and quite different world. It is because youth is fast getting the idea that the church is an institution impervious to change. It is because youth is becoming convinced that ministers of the gospel dare not come out and speak their minds on theological questions which might provoke controversies. The church must have unity and peace and harmony among its members at any cost. Therefore, ministers must continue to preach sermons which, while they are for the most part excellent sermons, make no real contribution to the questioning spirit of youth. At least, that is how the younger generation sees it.

Youth wants to know what modern ministers actually think about the dogma of the Virgin Birth. It wants to know whether ministers still believe in the Deity of Jesus. And it wants to know, in case ministers do believe in the Virgin Birth and in the Deity of Jesus, whether these same ministers insist that such beliefs are essential to the Christian faith and to the Christian life—whether one must believe these dogmas in order to be a Christian. Youth wants to know a number of things which, for one reason or another, the church refuses to discuss.

Ten or fifteen years ago, ministers might get

away with this sort of "absent treatment." But today they must speak out or lose the allegiance of the younger generation. The laboratory method is the method of the age. Whatever cannot stand investigation should be junked,—in religion as in everything else. If the dogmas of the church are truth they have only to gain through honest inquiry and analysis. If they are not truth, then the sooner they are abandoned the better. That is how youth feels about it. It wants to know. It is passionately in earnest. And because the church refuses to speak the language it understands, it is turning from the church in bitter disappointment.

The Deity of Jesus. Tens of thousands of young people, and their numbers are being augmented every year, would welcome a perfectly frank and open discussion of this dogma apparently so vital to the faith of hosts of Christians. They would like to know what possible bearing such a dogma can have on the religion of Jesus and why people who abandon it may not be just as good Christians as other people who hold to it. They would like to have some minister explain to them in what conceivable way the character and personality of Jesus, and the influence of Jesus in modern life, are related to this dogma. If it be a rational and essential dogma, the younger generation wants to

cling to it, for the younger generation is not revolting just for the sake of revolt. It is revolting because that is the only thing left to do.

Time and again, youth's elders have diagnosed the case of the younger generation. Now, for a change, the younger generation is determined to do a little diagnosing on its own account. And here is what it wants most of all—spiritual counselors who will really counsel; ministers of the gospel who, when they mount the pulpit, are not thinking how deacon Jones and aunt Mary may react, but how youth may react. An altogether disproportionate amount of consideration has been bestowed upon deacon Jones and aunt Mary. Possibly, if the truth were known, deacon Jones and aunt Mary are not so far behind in the procession as their minister imagines. Many a deacon Jones and aunt Mary have caught the spirit of the new age and are wondering why their unprogressive minister insists on living in the past. Whatever the pronouncements of the modern pulpit might be on the questions that are disturbing youth, youth wants to hear them. If it cannot hear them in the church, then it will turn elsewhere for enlightenment.

Professor Markham declared, "The Christian religion is made up of a mass of impossible dogmas,

and one of the most impossible of these impossibles is the Deity of Jesus." That was his bold, blunt, and unnecessarily antagonistic way of stating a proposition. It was thoroughly destructive. But that same idea might be conveyed by the modern pulpit and be just as thoroughly constructive. The trouble is not so much with the idea as with the method of stating it.

The dogma of the Deity of Jesus most certainly did not originate with Jesus. None of the dogmas of the church originated with Jesus. They were all manufactured in the speculative, prescientific centuries that followed. Jesus was not a theologian. He was an exemplar. He had no time to waste in useless speculation. His business was to live. Life was the thing he was forever emphasizing. He had rather live God than to speculate about God. Christianity has produced many theologians who, in this respect, have closely imitated their Master; it has produced others who had much rather speculate about God than to live God. To speculate is infinitely easier than to live.

Theologians, NOT JESUS, are responsible for this dogma of the Deity of Jesus. Theologians, however, have endeavored to the utmost to make Jesus responsible. They have taken his words and phrases and twisted them into meanings utterly

foreign to the ideas he endeavored to convey. And, in all fairness, let us say, their intentions have ordinarily been the best. Take, for instance, Jesus' declaration, "I and my Father are one." Theologians have contended that Jesus thereby proclaimed himself "God." But, in the original Greek, that little word "one" happens to be in the neuter gender, and that puts an altogether different construction on Jesus' declaration. He was simply saying, "I and my Father are one in spirit, in purpose, in our endeavor to help people live more abundantly." So might St. Francis of Assisi have spoken, or Abraham Lincoln, or any other great character in these times whose life is dominated by the God-spirit. By this statement, Jesus was not setting himself off in a world by himself. He was doing precisely the opposite. He was proclaiming, for himself *and for all men*, the boundless spiritual potentialities of human nature. He might have added, had he thought it necessary, "Your life should be such that you can honestly say what I say, 'I and my Father are one.'"

So with the declaration—"He that beholds me beholds the Father," "No man cometh unto the Father but by me," "I am the way, the truth, and the life," and numerous others of a kindred nature. Ingenious theologians have taken statements like

these and built them into the dogma of the Deity of Jesus. And this despite the fact that on numerous occasions Jesus did his best to make it clear that he did not conceive of himself as God, but rather as a spiritual ambassador of God.

Consider some of his lucid, unequivocal utterances: "After this manner therefore pray ye—*Our* Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be *thy* name. *Thy* kingdom come. *Thy* will be done on earth as it is in heaven. *Thine* is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever." Surely a rather peculiar prayer to be taught by one who conceived of himself as God.

There is a vast difference between being God and being godlike. Jesus claimed for himself most emphatically "godlikeness." On no occasion did he even suggest that he was God. From beginning to end, the gospels are replete with evidences on this point. Take the following: "That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father who is in secret; and thy Father, who seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly." . . . "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." . . . "Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is God." . . . "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father

give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" . . . "But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipper shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a spirit; and they who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." . . . "I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not." . . . "I speak that which I have seen with my Father." . . . "As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father." . . . "Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him." . . . "Believe in God; believe *also* in me." . . . "I speak not of myself; but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works." . . . "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another comforter, that he may abide with you forever." . . . "If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." . . . "But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave me the commandment, even so I do." . . . "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples." . . . "Father, the hour is come, glorify thy son, that thy son also may glorify thee." . . . "And this is life eternal, that they may know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." . . . "O righteous

Father, the world hath not known thee; but I have known thee."

One might continue quotations of this kind indefinitely. They all provide indisputable evidence that Jesus thought of himself merely in the capacity of a spiritual ambassador of God, not as God himself. But our medieval theologians (and those of our modern theologians who still cling tenaciously to medieval thought-categories) would not have it so. They insisted on making Jesus a God—an idea which, of all men, Jesus would have been the first to repudiate. They indulged in all manner of irrational speculation in working out their impossible theories. Time and again, angry councils of the church debated and wrangled over the question; and, all the while, the spirit of the godlike Jesus was forgotten.

Finally was fashioned the doctrine of the Trinity which, as a demonstration of astounding ingenuity and imagination run riot, leaves little to be desired. This doctrine proclaims "the union of three persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—in one Godhead, so that all the three are one God *as to substance*, but three persons *as to individuality*." Amazing wisdom! Profoundest spiritual insight! Thus, despite all his declarations

to the contrary, Jesus was made a God,—the one and only God.

Now, to the younger generation, all such wild theorizings seem sheerest nonsense. Youth has no interest whatever in speculations of this sort. It is convinced that the dogma of the Deity of Jesus is utterly foreign to any and all of the teachings of Jesus. It is infinitely more concerned over the Jesus of history than over the Christ of theology. It is puzzled to know how any rational individual who thinks in terms of the spirit of our modern world can adhere to any such dogma. Of course, one can easily understand how people of a pre-scientific age might have accepted it, how Jesus might have been thought of as God in an age that conceived of this planet of ours as the real center of the universe. It is not so easy to understand how people of a preeminently scientific age can accept such a dogma. It is not so clear how Jesus may be thought of as God in an age which conceives of our planet as only a speck in the universe. That God himself,—the whole of God—could or would have become incarnate in one individual living on this infinitesimal earth planet, puts rather a severe strain on even the most vivid imagination. It is one of those ideas which belong to the past. It has no place in the present. That is how modern youth sees the matter.

The younger generation feels that it would be much to the advantage of Jesus if he were presented as just a human being who came the nearest to a perfect incarnation—*not of God, but of the God-spirit*—of any person in the history of the race. If Jesus were God, he deserves no credit for a noble achievement in character. In fact, there was no achievement. If Jesus were God, he is no example for ordinary mortals. How can a God be an example for anybody? Make me a God and I will do the marvelous things which Jesus is said to have done and do them more easily than the blundering things which I am doing today. This half man—half God, all man—all God, now man—now God character whom theologians call the Christ, does not appeal to modern youth. Youth wants a saviour who *became*, not who was. It wants a saviour who traveled the same difficult human road which youth has to travel and who, by virtue of the divine spirit incarnate in human nature, achieved godlikeness. It wants a saviour who has demonstrated a type of life which youth may hope to imitate and, in some measure, reproduce. It is no longer interested in this impossible deity creation of theologians.

This point requires special emphasis. The younger generation makes a sharp distinction between “deity” and “divinity.” While it is com-

elled to reject the dogma of the Deity of Jesus, it feels that it can hold consistently and wholeheartedly to the doctrine of the Divinity of Jesus. It regards Jesus as the most divine man—that is to say, the most godlike man—of the ages; a man who by arduous spiritual discipline achieved a character which embodied more completely than any other character the attributes which one inevitably ascribes to God. And it is thoroughly convinced that this ACHIEVED DIVINITY, this godlikeness, is of a much higher order, and vastly more to the credit of Jesus, than any READY-MADE DEITY TYPE OF DIVINITY; that Jesus was and is an infinitely greater character if he actually achieved godlikeness than if godlikeness were gratuitously thrust upon him.

And, furthermore, the younger generation insists that every individual who gives himself over to the rule of the God-spirit may achieve for himself, in some measure, the godlikeness, the divinity, of Jesus.

In the mind of youth, "deity" applies to God and to God alone. "Divinity" applies to all men. It stands for the development of the spiritual potentialities of human nature. The measure of one's approach to godlikeness is the measure of this development. "Divinity," therefore, is a question of the degree of one's spiritual development rather

than a question of the source of one's spiritual powers. It is only another name for godlikeness.

Jesus is divine—not because he was born a God or the *only* Son of God, but because he developed godlike attributes. He is more divine than any other person because he developed these attributes to a greater degree than any other person.

Such is the spirit and reasoning of modern youth.

Does the Christian church have in it a place for people who reason after this fashion?

Youth wants to know.

### III

#### WHAT DIFFERENCE CAN IT POSSIBLY MAKE?

ONE of the doctrines upon which I staked my early religious faith was the Resurrection of Jesus. And, by resurrection, I meant, of course, "physical" resurrection. That is what most people mean. That is what youth invariably means. The resurrection of Jesus meant to me that the actual physical body of Jesus rose from the grave. I had not yet come to think in any other terms. But the day of reckoning was at hand.

As Professor Markham mounted the rostrum one morning and took his accustomed place behind his reading desk, he noticed a scrap of paper left there for his inspection. He picked it up, scanned it hurriedly, and paused. It was one of those shuddering pauses which he was a past master in producing.

"‘Do you believe in the physical resurrection of Jesus?’ "

He read the question slowly and paused again, his piercing eyes searching the faces of the students before him as well as the faces of a goodly number of visitors.

"‘Do you believe in the physical resurrection of Jesus?’” And then another of those ominous pauses.

“I have no idea who wrote that question,” he said rather crisply, “and I’m not particularly interested in knowing. Evidently the author of it has done no great amount of original thinking. Otherwise, the question would be unnecessary. But I’ll answer it. Of course, I do not believe in the physical resurrection of Jesus. Nobody who has freed himself from the shackles of medievalism believes in the physical resurrection of Jesus. It is one of those prescientific dogmas which has no place whatever in an age of science. And anyway, what difference can it possibly make to your religion or mine whether or not the physical body of Jesus actually rose from the grave? Not the slightest conceivable difference.”

That was all. Professor Markham went on with his lecture. But some of us failed to follow him. We were in too much of a mental and spiritual tangle to follow anybody or anything. Over and over again during that lecture period, I found myself repeating the question, “What difference can it possibly make?”

Just then it seemed to make a tremendous difference. Professor Markham had denied unequiv-

ocally one of the cardinal doctrines of my faith. At least, that was how it appeared to me.

"What difference can it possibly make?"

I thought of some of the sayings of Paul: "If Christ be not risen from the dead, then is your faith vain, and our hope is also vain" . . . "Now is Christ risen from the dead and become the first-fruits of them that slept" . . . "For the Lord, himself, shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first." Who was probably right, Paul or Professor Markham? Paul certainly understood the spiritual import of Jesus' message as well, if not better, than any man of any period of the Christian era. Could Paul, spiritual colossus that he was, have been mistaken?

Next I turned to the gospels. Their testimony was just as clear and emphatic as Paul's. And, in all of them, the idea of a "physical" resurrection seemed to predominate. Were the gospel records to be adjudged erroneous? Who was probably right, the gospel writers or Professor Markham?

And how about the nineteen centuries of the Christian era? All through those centuries, people had accepted the "physical" resurrection of Jesus

as a fact, and a vitally important fact, in the faith of a Christian. Could one reasonably ignore the witness of nineteen centuries?

That was my initial reaction to Professor Markham's verdict on the doctrine of the resurrection. His pronouncement struck me as sacrilegious, almost blasphemous. But as time went on, I found another reaction setting in.

"What difference can it possibly make?" No question ever stayed by me more persistently. It came to be a sort of criterion by which I measured the worth of every creed. If a thing can make no possible difference, it has no very great value. If it can make some difference, however slight, then it does have value. The measure of its value is the measure of the difference it makes.

Somehow, I gradually came to feel that this "cardinal" doctrine could make no possible difference to my religion. It was out of accord with everything else in my universe. It was diametrically at variance with modern cosmogony. It could not stand the test of modern science. It was just a beautiful dream, the creation of loving hearts that would not admit that the Christ, the very God of the universe, could succumb to death as men succumb to death. I had no other interpretation of the resurrection to offer. I simply abandoned

the doctrine in response to what appeared to me the unanswerable verdict of logic. "What difference can it possibly make?" I kept asking myself; and invariably I could hear ringing in my ears the reply given by Professor Markham, "Not the slightest conceivable difference."

And yet it did make a difference. I had lost something—something big and vital and essential. My religious faith was not the strong, vigorous, unchallengeable and buoyant thing it was a few months before. It was a staggering faith, and certain doom seemed waiting it just around the corner. Then, one day, I came all unexpectedly upon an infinitely superior and more wonderful interpretation.

This is how it happened. We were seated one Sunday afternoon, the Rev. Robert Robinson and I, in that spacious, confidence-inspiring library of his, talking over some of my difficulties. It was that summer at the end of my second collegiate year when I had definitely abandoned all thought of entering the Christian ministry. A few Sundays before I had listened to the most revelatory sermon I had ever heard. Suddenly, turning to my new spiritual counselor, I asked bluntly: "Dr. Robinson, do you believe in the physical resurrection of Jesus?"

"I had expected that question sooner or later," came the quiet, unperturbed reply. "It's a perfectly natural question, and I'm going to answer it in the frankest possible way. No, I do not believe in the physical resurrection of Jesus. I believe, with Paul, in something infinitely more meaningful than a physical resurrection. I believe in a spiritual resurrection."

"But didn't Paul hold to the idea of a physical resurrection?" I asked.

"No," replied Dr. Robinson. "Paul taught and *practiced* the doctrine of a spiritual resurrection. His words admit of no other construction: 'And he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve, and after that he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; after that he was seen of James, and then of the apostles, and last of all, he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.'

"Paul, you see, makes no distinction between these various appearances. He puts them all in the same category. And yet he takes pains to make it clear that it was IN A VISION that Jesus appeared to him. The natural assumption would be that, in the judgment of Paul, he appeared to all these others in visions. Paul is very emphatic on this point. He is also emphatic in his statements about the nature of the resurrection. Here

is the way he puts it: 'So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body and there is a spiritual body. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.' "

I began to see light. A "spiritual" resurrection offered no insurmountable obstacles to my faith. In fact, the very presence and influence of Jesus in the world today made such a belief appear inevitable.

"But how account for the gospel records?" I asked. "They all witness to a physical resurrection."

"Yes and no," replied my spiritual adviser. "In every gospel, the two ideas of a physical and spiritual resurrection are strangely intermingled.

"One disciple, before he would believe, insisted on placing his own fingers on the scars left by the nails in Jesus' hands and feet. Here, surely, stress is put on the conception of a physical resurrection.

"On one occasion, Jesus partook of food in the presence of two of the disciples. Again, the physical emphasis. The conclusion of the account, however, which tells of Jesus suddenly vanishing, would suggest an apparition.

"Shortly after this, the eleven were gathered

together when suddenly Jesus appeared in their midst; ‘but they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit.’ Jesus then offered them a demonstration of his actual physical presence. He showed them his hands and feet, bearing the imprints of the nails. Next he asked for food. He was given broiled fish and a piece of honeycomb which he ate in their midst. Here the two ideas are in very evident conflict, with emphasis laid upon the physical.

“On still another occasion, the eleven were assembled in a room, the doors of which were closed, presumably barred as the disciples were in fear of the Jews, when suddenly Jesus appeared in their midst. Here again, the idea of the actual physical presence of Jesus is strangely mingled with the idea of an apparition.

“Once, we are told, Jesus appeared to the eleven on a mountain. Some believed; others doubted. It would be difficult to doubt an actual physical presence. But serious doubts there were, even among the disciples. And so, while the predominant stress in the gospels is upon a physical resurrection, there are numerous indications that, in the minds of many, the presence of Jesus was something else than physical. At any rate, something happened to convince these disciples that their

Christ was not dead, but alive; not conquered by the grave, but victorious over death. And in that faith they triumphed."

"And what was that something?" I inquired.

"An experience," replied Dr. Robinson. "The spirit of God witnessing to the spirit of men,—a sudden and irresistible conviction of the supremacy of the spiritual. A comparatively new idea in those times, a universal conviction in ours."

"But why the physical emphasis so prevalent in the gospels?" I asked.

"Because it is always difficult for the uneducated and undisciplined mind to think in terms of the abstract," came the quick answer. "Paul had no such difficulty. He could think of a spiritual resurrection without a physical setting. But that wasn't true of most of the people of that era. They had to have a physical setting, just as children find it necessary to think in terms of the seen and the tangible before they learn to think in terms of the unseen and the intangible."

"Throughout his whole ministry, Jesus had the greatest difficulty in getting people to think at all adequately in terms of the spiritual. He wanted them to think of a spiritual kingdom. They insisted on thinking of a temporal kingdom. On one occasion, he cried out in desperation: 'Why

do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my words. He that is of God heareth God's words; ye therefore hear them not because ye are not of God.'

"Is it any wonder that these same people should give a materialistic interpretation of the accounts of the resurrection and that as time went on this materialistic interpretation should take precedence over any and every spiritual interpretation? To the vast majority of the people of the first century, 'resurrection' could mean only one thing—the raising of the actual physical body of Jesus from the grave. Even after nineteen centuries it continues to mean just that to hosts of people."

"Apparently, it means precisely that to most of the clergy," I suggested.

"Well," replied Dr. Robinson, "I wouldn't want to put it quite as strong as that. But I do believe that clergymen could render our generation, and especially the younger portion of it, a great service by giving some of these ancient doctrines the attention they demand. The conception of a spiritual resurrection is so much more wonderful and meaningful than the conception of a physical resurrection. Why not state this noble doctrine of immortality in terms which our own age can understand and accept? Why insist upon the mate-

rialistic interpretation of the first century as the one and only interpretation?

"One gets an idea of the prevailing superstition and credulousness of New Testament times when he reads in Matthew's account of Jesus' resurrection the following account of other resurrections: 'And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom: and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; AND THE GRAVES WERE OPENED; and many of the bodies of the saints that slept arose; and came out of their graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city and appeared unto many.'

"Does any intelligent person of this day and generation believe that? Why, no. Then why insist that people believe the materialistic account which this same author gives of the resurrection of Jesus? Why not consider the age in which both accounts were written? Why not endeavor to get at the supreme spiritual fact which they strive to reveal? Why not approach the Bible with an open mind as well as with an open heart?"

I left Dr. Robinson that afternoon feeling that he had made an invaluable contribution to my life. He had given me back a bigger, finer creed than the one I had been compelled to abandon. I began to sense what Paul meant when he exclaimed:

"That I may know him and the power of his resurrection!"

The doctrine of the physical resurrection of Jesus is one of the chief stumbling-blocks to the faith of the younger generation. It appears not only untenable, but altogether unnecessary. What difference can it possibly make to anybody's religious faith whether or not Jesus' physical body actually rose from the grave and remained on this earth for a few brief days? Absolutely none. But the fact that the spirit of Jesus lives and throbs in the heart of humanity at the present time makes all the difference in the world. The witness of the twentieth century is mightier than the witness of the first. And in the twentieth century is to be found the real and abiding evidence of the resurrection of Jesus.

Science has no quarrel with the conception of a spiritual resurrection; neither has reason nor common-sense. Only a church which insists on thinking in the thought categories of the Middle Ages is astounded and alarmed.

Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life." To this tremendous utterance, the younger generation gives immediate and universal assent. It believes thoroughly that Jesus is the resurrection and the life for humanity in the twentieth century;

cannot help believing it; the evidence is overwhelming. But when it comes to giving to the doctrine of the resurrection a purely physical interpretation, and insisting that this interpretation is essential to the Christian faith, the younger generation rebels.

The physical resurrection of Jesus! The actual appearance of the flesh and blood body of Jesus on earth for a few days after his death!

What difference can it possibly make?

## IV

### HAPPENINGS THAT NEVER HAPPENED

FOR a number of years, the question of miracles gave me no end of trouble. It is giving young people everywhere no end of trouble. I wanted to believe the Bible, but I couldn't believe many of the Bible's records of miracles. And quite naturally I felt that to question any portion of the Bible was equivalent to questioning the whole Bible.

My case is not exceptional. It is typical. Hosts of young people are passing up the whole Bible simply because they cannot believe in all the miracles recorded there. It is not the fault of these young people. It is the fault of a church which refuses to think and to speak in terms of the spirit of a scientific age. Medievalism will never do for these modern times.

Why not face the issue courageously?

Every religion makes more or less use of the miraculous. The founder of every religion is invariably proclaimed a God, or the son of a God, or some mighty oracle of God. Everything about

this founder is more or less veiled in mystery—the manner of his birth, the environment of his childhood and youth, the revelations that come to him, the phenomenal things he accomplishes, the faith he inspires in the hearts of people, his magic influence over the masses. Mystery enshrouds him. The more mysterious a character he is made out to be, the greater is his vogue.

Miracles. People have always cried out for miracles. "Show us a sign and we will believe. Let us see what you can really do. Command that these stones be made bread." The more primitive the people, the louder their cry for miracles. Why shouldn't God's representative be able to accomplish whatever he chooses to accomplish? What earthly power may hope to triumph over an ambassador of the Almighty?

This credulous, superstitious, eager-to-be-shown characteristic of human nature has given charlatans their easy opportunities, and soothsayers, and fortune-tellers, and astrologers, and magicians, and quacks of all kinds and descriptions—particularly religious quacks.

Houdini would have been elevated to the rank of a God had he lived in the first century of the Christian era and been able to do the astounding things he has done in the twentieth. The whole

population would have stood before him in fear and awe—yes, and in reverence and adoration.

Power to perform miracles has been the crucial and exacting test demanded of the founder of practically every religion. And once he has established even the slightest claim to wonder-working powers, the people have magnanimously come to his assistance. The eager tongue has spread rumors, the vivid and constantly expanding imagination has filled the ears of multitudes with glowing accounts of happenings that never happened, the hopes and dreams and passions of people have speedily been converted into realities. The prophet has suddenly become a God.

And here is the strange thing about this whole miracle business—the adherents to any particular religion zealously believe in the miracles ascribed to the founder of their religion, but have absolutely no faith in the miracles ascribed to the founders of other religions, even though the miracles be of the same order. Christians believe that Jesus actually worked the miracles he is said to have worked, but discredit as pure fabrications the miracles said to have been worked by Mohammed. Mohammedans cling tenaciously to the miracles ascribed to Mohammed, but spurn the miracles ascribed to Jesus.

The reason for this is perfectly clear. The re-

ligious devotee, whatever his faith, is determined that the founder of his religion shall have more of *an inside track with God* than have the founders of other religions. Miracles provide the necessary proof. In defense of these miracles, he is ready to go to the very extremes of inconsistency. He is ready to live, or try to live, in two diametrically opposite worlds—the world of natural law and the world of magic. He is ready to spend an enormous amount of time and energy trying to reconcile irreconcilables and to demonstrate to himself and to others the rationality of his irrational logic. He is ready to do the most ridiculous things just to rescue his cherished miracles from destruction and to preserve a faith which he honestly believes cannot stand without miracles.

The whole race is afflicted with miracle mania. Even in an era of science like our own, multitudes of Christians have little difficulty in accepting, without serious misgivings, all the miracles ascribed to Jesus, while a surprising number apparently believe in the authenticity of most, if not all, of the miracles of the Old Testament. The dogma of Infallibility is responsible for much of this unbelievable credulousness. Much may also be accounted for by the fact that comparatively few people take the time or have the interest necessary

to subject their faith to a rigid analysis. It is just a case of "The old time religion is good enough for me."

That, however, is not the attitude of the younger generation.

The religion of the early Hebrews was saturated with the miracle spirit. The leaders of Israel were workers of miracles. Turn to the Old Testament and note how very important a place is given to miracles, and how often it is asserted that Jehovah looked upon miracles as the most effective way of demonstrating that he was Lord of Lords and God of Gods.

Take, for instance, the account of the exodus of the Hebrew people. God sent Moses to command Pharaoh to let the children of Israel go. But this Pharaoh was a stubborn fellow. He refused to comply with Moses' command. So God visited upon him first a plague of frogs. Frogs by the millions came out of the waters and ponds. There were frogs over the whole land, frogs in the houses of all the Egyptians, frogs everywhere. Pharaoh finally yielded. But shortly after, he repented his weakness and again refused to let his bondsmen go. Then God sent upon the land a plague of disease that killed all the Egyptians' cattle. Again Pharaoh yielded, and again he changed his mind.

Then followed a plague of hail that killed everybody not under cover; then a plague of locusts which ate up everything that had escaped the former plagues; and finally a plague of death that destroyed all the first-born of the Egyptians. By this time, Pharaoh was pretty thoroughly convinced of the power of Moses' God.

The record of God's miraculous plagues closes with these triumphant words: "Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the Lord for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and my song, and he is become my salvation; he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him. The Lord is a man of war: the Lord is his name."

Now, what is the younger generation to do with a series of alleged miraculous happenings such as these? There is only one thing to do—reject them. But the danger is that, in rejecting these and numerous other accounts of a kindred nature, it will come to reject the whole Bible.

The younger generation needs help. Who is to give it?

It needs help in straightening out its conception of the miraculous. It reads how Abraham

was miraculously led of God who miraculously provided for all his wants—even a son was born to him and Sarah, his wife, when he was ninety-nine and she ninety. It reads how Moses, in his cradle of reeds, was miraculously saved from death; was miraculously called back from the land of Midian to become the leader of the hosts of Israel; miraculously received from the hand of God the decalogue inscribed on tables of stone; miraculously led his people out of bondage; miraculously parted, with his magic wand, the waters of the Red Sea; miraculously provided for the necessities of his people; and, finally, after a whole lifetime of miraculous happenings, passed miraculously on into the great unknown. God, himself, presided at his funeral and no man ever knew the place of his burial.

The younger generation reads of Lot's wife being turned into a pillar of salt; of Elijah swept up into heaven in a chariot of fire; of Elisha commanding Naaman to dip seven times in the waters of the Jordan and of the leper cured of his leprosy; of this same Elisha causing an axe-head to float; and again of his calling down the wrath of heaven upon a group of rollicking youngsters who had made fun of his bald head. Forty-two of these

youngsters, we are told, were immediately destroyed by she-bears.

Young people read these accounts and numerous similar accounts of miraculous happenings and wonder how the Bible ever came to be called "The Word of God" and "The Book of Books." They wonder if the clergy and the people who make up the membership of the Christian church really expect them to accept as facts these very manifest pieces of fiction. They wonder if they must throw reason to the winds in order to be Christians.

They read on into the New Testament and find the people of that era living in a world of magic. Miracles are recorded on every page—miracles possibly of a little higher order but, for the most part, of the same general character as the miracles of the Old Testament. They read about the Virgin Birth, the Resurrection, and the Ascension. They read accounts of all manner of miracles said to have been performed by Jesus—turning water into wine, feeding a hungry multitude with a few loaves and fishes and having more left over than he had to begin with, walking on the surface of the sea, casting a legion of devils out of a man and into a herd of swine, causing a barren fig-tree to wither and die by a mere curse pronounced upon it, healing all manner of diseases, even raising the dead. And

they ask themselves—ordinarily, they do not ask anybody else—“Are we expected to believe *all* these records?” And the answer, so far as they can sense it, seems to be: “Yes, you are most surely expected to believe *all* these records. Discriminations are not in order.”

And then people wonder why the younger generation is losing interest in the church.

Well, youth is losing interest because it cannot agree with any such literal interpretation of Bible literature. It believes in making reasonable discriminations. It finds many of the Bible’s miraculous accounts—if literalness be insisted upon—decidedly uninteresting, irksome, and altogether at variance with its own everyday experiences. Youth wants religion—*real religion*. It does not want a mass of superstition labelled “religion.” It can see no reason why the Christian religion rests, or should rest, upon any such flimsy foundation.

But, leaving aside for the moment all healing miracles, aren’t the nature miracles ascribed to Jesus to be put in a different category from the miracles of the Old Testament? Why should they be? The same credulous spirit that gave them birth keeps them alive. A Christian would not think of putting the miracles ascribed to Mohammed in another and higher category, even though

millions of Mohammedans insist upon their authenticity. Then why the nature miracles of Jesus? Is there any good reason why the superstitions attached to the religion of Jesus should be held any more sacred than the superstitions attached to any other religion? Jesus did not originate these superstitions. They were originated by a credulous people who wanted a miracle-working Christ; by people who would not be satisfied unless their Christ were the God of the whole universe, and capable of altering or setting aside even the laws of the natural world.

The indiscriminate miracles ascribed to Jesus constitute one of the heaviest loads the religion of Jesus has ever been called upon to carry. And loads have a way of getting heavier with the passing of time.

The Christian religion is going to make a gripping appeal to the younger generation only as the Christian church takes a definite and modern stand on this age-old question of miracles; only as it lifts Jesus above the necessity of resorting to works of magic to demonstrate his spiritual power.

The younger generation wants a *miracle-working Christ*; but, when it says "*miracle-working Christ*," it is thinking in terms of character rather than in terms of the natural universe.

The healing miracles ascribed to Jesus are of a different order. Modern youth has no doubt that Jesus performed many marvelous deeds. One possessed of a character and personality such as his could not help performing marvelous deeds. It has no doubt that the mere presence of Jesus cured many people of their afflictions and sent them forth rejoicing, to proclaim far and wide that, in him, could be found a cure for every malady.

Particularly effective was Jesus in dealing with those ills of mind and body caused by *fixed ideas*. Call such ills imaginary, if you will. They, none the less, constitute a large group of the most difficult cases the medical profession has to deal with.

A prominent physician once stated to me that fully one-half the people who came to him for treatment would have fared just as well without him if only they could have rid themselves of certain fixed and torturous ideas,—ideas which had succeeded in undermining both mind and body. These people were sick—some of them desperately sick—simply because they had permitted fixed ideas of illness or of possible illness to dominate their whole consciousness.

Most of us suffer more from fixed ideas than from actual organic diseases. Get a fixed idea that eventually you are going to land in the poor-house

and you actually live in a poor-house all your days. Get a fixed idea that you have some incurable malady and, so far as your feelings are concerned, you might about as well have that malady. Thousands of people have died just of fixed ideas.

The younger generation believes that Jesus cured many people of these torturous, tormenting ideas —ideas which made them feel that they were possessed of whole legions of devils. It believes that the mere presence of his magnetic personality brought peace and calm into many a turbulent life. It believes that, by filling people's hearts with the love of God, he actually did cast out what in those days were called "demons." It believes that always and everywhere he had a healing influence. But it does not believe that, because Jesus performed *many* wonderful deeds, one must, of necessity, assume that he performed *all* the wonderful deeds ascribed to him.

Here is where the whole difficulty lies in this question of the origin of the accounts of miracles ascribed to Jesus. Nothing is more natural than for a credulous people to infer that a person who can do one apparently marvelous thing can do any marvelous thing. Hence the indiscriminate miracles which Jesus is said to have performed.

The younger generation, therefore, would di-

vide the alleged miracles of Jesus into two general classes—nature miracles and healing miracles. These nature miracles, the inevitable outgrowth of a wide-spread belief in healing miracles, it would discard as wholly unauthentic. The healing miracles, in turn, it would divide into two groups—those dealing with imagined illnesses or fixed ideas, and those having to do with actual organic diseases. Miracles of the first group, it would regard, for the most part, as authentic. As to miracles of the second group, it would hazard no judgment. It recognizes the healing power of both mind and spirit. What may have been the reaches of that healing power in the mightiest spiritual genius of the ages, it sees no way of determining, no necessity of determining; for, in the mind of the younger generation, the spiritual authority of Jesus in the life of humanity today is in no wise dependent upon his reputed miracle-working powers. That spiritual authority lies in a character which has stood the crucial tests of the centuries only to appear more godlike as men have come to a profounder understanding and appreciation of it.

Jesus plead with people not to advertise him as a miracle-worker. He did not want to be regarded as a divine magician. More than once he refused to concede to demands that he perform some

mighty work as evidence of his rightful claim to spiritual leadership. He wanted to be judged by altogether different standards—by his character, by his teachings, by the services he rendered humanity, by the demonstration he was endeavoring to make of the power of the love of God in the soul of man. But it's so easy for the average individual to erect false standards; so difficult for him to comprehend what actually constitutes spiritual achievement and authority. And so the fame of Jesus during his public ministry rested almost wholly upon his reputed power to work miracles. People insisted upon the material aspects of religion. They insist upon them today. The spiritual is all too often forgotten. The body takes precedence over the soul.

Until comparatively recent times, Jesus' fame and the very existence of the Christian church has, in the minds of multitudes, continued to rest upon the miracles he is said to have wrought. The emphasis has shifted considerably of late; will shift very decidedly in the next few decades. But, even today, hosts of genuinely Christian men and women feel that to give up their belief in even the nature miracles ascribed to Jesus would amount to the same thing as giving up their religious faith.

The younger generation most assuredly appre-

ciates this point of view. It is perfectly willing that its elders accept as authentic any or all of the miracles of both the Old Testament and the New, if they must. But it objects, and objects strenuously, to having this unqualified belief insisted upon as essential to all Christians. It feels that the religion of Jesus is more attractive, more compelling, and decidedly more rational when miracles are given a proper interpretation.

But the way out is not as yet very clear in the minds of many. Hosts of the younger generation have not thought their way through to satisfactory conclusions.

They need a CONSTRUCTIVE LIFT—need someone to say: "Don't let this question of miracles rob you of your faith. Your faith is independent of all such considerations. Religion is life, not dogma. *'The Christian is the person who honestly tries to live out the spirit and the teachings of Jesus. Nothing more. Nothing less.'*"

## V

### ASKING THE IMPOSSIBLE

IF young people, unitedly, could speak their mind on the subject of creeds, they doubtless would say something like this: "We recognize the importance of creeds and the necessity of creeds. We know that creeds stand for convictions, or should stand for convictions. We want creeds—just as big and wonderful creeds as we can possibly have. But we are not interested in creeds that express merely the convictions of yesterday. Don't ask the impossible. Don't ask us to subscribe to creeds that are hopelessly out of date. Our creeds are not, and never can be, the dogmas of the Middle Ages."

Is the judgment of the younger generation on this subject worth considering?

As youth sees it, creeds may be a help or a hindrance, a lift or a load. It all depends on whether they are kept up to date. Our social and industrial and political creeds are being constantly revamped, enlarged and multiplied to meet new situations. That is why they are living creeds. They express living convictions. They embody the thought and conscience of the times.

This is true of practically all creeds except religious creeds. These refuse to be budged. They are sacred and, therefore, tabooed. They are not to be touched or handled. They are not to be revamped. They are not to be profaned. Occasionally, after a series of revolutionary jolts, a few minor modifications may be made, but only occasional and only minor.

Of all the creeds that are behind the times and wholly out of accord with the spirit of the age, religious creeds stand first and foremost. "God's truths are eternal. The creeds of the church embody these truths. Therefore, they are eternal. Yesterday, today, and forever, they are an adequate expression of the convictions of men." So runs the verdict of the church.

It is this kind of traditional nonsense, robed in the garments of piety, that has worked such an endless amount of dire havoc; this unpardonable folly that is closing the doors of the church against the younger generation. And the church has only itself to blame. It has placed more false constructions on the teachings of Jesus than all the atheists and agnostics and infidels in the world, in all generations, combined. And to make matters still worse, it has insisted, even to the point of heresy trials and excommunication, that these false inter-

pretations be perpetuated intact. Its anathemas are among the colossal jokes of the centuries. Its frantic and futile efforts to hold back the swelling tide of scientific thinking is enough to make even the hills and valleys weep. And all the time, the younger generation pursues its bewildered way—  
REGARDLESS.

On any Sunday, in churches of almost every denomination, one may hear the minister and the congregation recite in unison the Apostles' creed. To be sure, many—including oftentimes, let us hope, the minister himself—recite it with a goodly amount of mental reservation. But why this mental reservation? Why not downright honesty? Why declare in words what one must deny in fact and in spirit? Why keep on reciting a dogma that is of the past, by the past, and for the past? And when one declares in so many words that he *does* believe the statements of a creed to be true, how, in the name of common-sense and reason, is the younger generation to know that he does not actually believe them, but is merely paying his reluctant respects to the past?

If absolute intellectual honesty were ever a godlike quality that time is the HERE AND NOW. Some churches are even so liberal as to say, "The Apostles' creed is a part of our confession of faith;

but, of course, we allow everyone to put upon it his own construction.” Liberalism, indeed! Full-fledged, unfettered liberalism! Why not rather the blindest bigotry? With the younger generation crying out for the truth; in fact, battling its desperate way on in quest of the truth, the church of Jesus Christ offers a dogma which people who have come to believe in the verdicts of science cannot possibly accept.

“I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth: and in Jesus Christ, His only son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost; born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into hell; the third day He arose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven; and sitteth on the right hand of God, the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; the Holy Catholic Church; the Communion of Saints; the Forgiveness of sins; the Resurrection of the body; and the Life everlasting.”

The dead hand of the past. The convictions of men which are no longer the convictions of men. A medieval dogma whose declarations thinking people have long since discredited. But the Christian church, “out of regard for the things that are

sacred" still continues to recite this meaningless jumble of words. Not the younger generation. The younger generation, for quite obvious reasons, is not present to join in the recitation. The younger generation is trying to find God in a rational universe. It has given up trying to find him in theological insane asylums. It's a rough trail to follow without any guides or guide-posts, but natural instinct gives a sense of right direction, and natural instinct is saving the day.

Now, just what would the younger generation do with the Apostles' creed? Well, if it had its way, it would inscribe it in some volume of antique theological relics. Inscribe it and leave it there. Whatever value it may have for our times lies merely in the comparison it makes possible between the thought of the early centuries of the Christian era and our own. Inscribe it and leave it there. Eliminate it entirely as a part of Christian ritual. And in its place substitute some other creed in line with modern Christian thought—some creed which, itself, will need constant revamping as time goes on.

But, if the younger generation cannot have its way in this matter, then it would respectfully suggest a number of changes which might take some of the manifest antiqueness out of this antique document.

In the first place, it would eliminate the word "only" before the word "Son." The younger generation believes thoroughly that Jesus was the son of God. It does not believe that he was the "only" son of God. It believes that all men everywhere are sons of God, all endowed with divine potentialities, all capable of making immeasurable spiritual progress. It does not set Jesus off in a God-realm by himself. It brings him into the realm of other human beings. It believes in his divine humanity. It believes also in the potentially divine humanity of all the sons of God.

Jesus, to the younger generation, is the most outstanding demonstration we know anything about—the most outstanding demonstration conceivable—of what humanity, in varying degrees, may approximate. To call him the "only" son of God takes him completely out of the human realm and makes him meaningless. Youth wants an ideal capable of being realized. It is not interested in ideals which only gods can realize.

If Jesus, through natural spiritual endowments, by strength of character, and by the most rigid self-discipline, achieved what we call "divinity" just as other men through natural spiritual endowments, by strength of character, and by the most rigid self-discipline, achieve what, in some measure, approximates the divinity of Jesus, then

his divinity is of an infinitely higher order than any ready-made and gratuitous divinity could possibly be. We honor Jesus when we claim for him an ACHIEVED divinity. And, what is of vastly greater significance, we make him a practical ideal for the race of men to follow.

That is the first change which the younger generation would suggest in its revision of the Apostles' creed.

In the second place, it would mark out the phrase, "conceived by the Holy Ghost." Such an idea is completely foreign and impossible to the mind of the youth of today. Youth believes that Jesus' advent into the world followed the same natural laws as the advent of any other person. It is utterly incapable of thinking in terms of an "immaculate conception," or perhaps, rather, the kind of "immaculate conception" indicated by this dogma. It believes that every true and spiritual conception is immaculate; and that the sooner the church stresses this fact, the better it will be for humanity, particularly for that portion of humanity represented by youth. The idea of an "immaculate conception" was the idea of an age that had not yet learned to think after the lofty ideals and teachings of Jesus. Youth would eliminate it.

And, for reasons already set forth, youth would

cross out the words, "born of the Virgin Mary." It would forever do away with the superstition that the founder of a religion, in order to exercise spiritual authority, must be a God. It does not want a God-saviour. It wants a man-saviour. As a tribute of the early Christian centuries to the character and influence of Jesus, the dogma of the Virgin Birth may have value. As a statement of historic fact, it must be discarded.

In the next place, the younger generation would eliminate the sentence, "He descended into hell." Most churches have already eliminated it,—eliminated it because it grated too much upon the finer sensibilities, and because its conflict with modern cosmogony is too clearly evident to make a plausible defense possible. Even the most ingenious explanations have not sufficed to save it from disaster. In a hymnal much in vogue when I was a boy—a hymnal, by the way, still in vogue—the Apostles' creed is printed in full. This particular sentence, "He descended into hell," is starred. A note at the bottom of the page says: "i.e., continued in the state of the dead, and under the power of death, until the third day."

Can youth be expected to sanction any such flimsy explanation as that? Wouldn't it be better to consign to limbo a creed requiring that sort of

bolstering up? That, at least, is what the younger generation does with it.

The next elimination would be, "The third day he arose from the dead." This statement means just one thing—a physical resurrection. With the single exception of Paul, we have no evidence that any of the writers of the New Testament thought of the resurrection of Jesus in terms of the spiritual. They had in mind an actual physical resurrection. All the accounts of the empty tomb, the soldiers paralyzed by fear, the angels announcing, "He is risen," and the later appearances of Jesus, are just so many rumors, so many tributes of love, gradually solidified into alleged facts. So the younger generation regards them.

Next, would come the striking out of the sentence, "He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God, the Father Almighty, from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead." Modern science knows nothing of any such heaven. Neither does the younger generation. The younger generation prefers to believe with Jesus that "the kingdom of heaven is within you." It believes with him in the immortality of the soul. It cannot define just what immortality means and in just what form it will find expression. But it does believe in living, here and now, for the things

that in all generations have made for immortality.

It is not unmindful of the immortality of character, the immortality of influence. If that be the only kind of immortality, then youth is satisfied with that. But with this material ascension into a material heaven, and this sitting on a material throne at the right hand of a material God, youth has not the slightest interest.

Next, for the sake of clearness, it would suggest that in the expression, "I believe in the Holy Ghost," the word "Ghost" be changed to "Spirit." "Holy Spirit" falls much more in line with youth's sentiments and conceptions than "Holy Ghost."

Before the words "Catholic Church," it would erase the word "Holy." When has the church ever been entitled to any such designation? Words of that order should not be used in any loose and careless way. Most assuredly, the church ought to do its utmost to approximate holiness, though even in this respect it has failed grievously; but to call the church the body of Christ and to declare that it has achieved holiness is altogether too much for modern youth, particularly for that portion of modern youth familiar with church history.

Next, would come the blotting out of the word "Catholic" and the substitution therefore of "Universal." This, again, for the sake of clearness.

"I believe in the Church Universal" would have a truer ring than "I believe in the Holy Catholic Church."

The younger generation would also revise somewhat the expression, "Communion of Saints." This calling one's self a saint smacks a trifle too much of egotism. Why not say, "The communion of people who honestly try to live out the spirit of Jesus"? Youth is not yet ready to classify itself among the saints.

And, finally, it would blot out entirely the phrase, "the Resurrection of the body."

After such a revision, the Apostles' creed would read something like this: "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, his son, our Lord; who was born of Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Church Universal, the communion of people who honestly try to live out the spirit of Jesus, and in the life everlasting."

However incomplete, a creed like that would be infinitely superior to the creed as it now stands. At least, it would not defy reason; it would not clash with modern science; and it would not be utterly impossible to the mind of the younger generation.

Creeds are essential. They are inevitable. They have their very definite and significant place in human life. But a creed, to be of the slightest value, must express a conviction. When that conviction passes, the creed, of necessity, passes with it. Only by constant revising and revamping can our creeds continue to be living realities.

This is how the younger generation feels about creeds.

It believes that, in requiring assent to medieval dogmas, the Christian church has been asking the impossible.

VI

HEAVEN AND HELL

Is there a heaven?

Is there a hell?

If so, what are they and where are they?

If not, what is to be gained by perpetuating errors which have caused such endless speculation and conflict and wrangling and unrest and agony?

The younger generation is pretty well convinced that a large portion of the church—the “orthodox” clergy and “orthodox” Christians everywhere—still clings to both these heaven and hell dogmas. It has abundant reason to feel that way. The clergy are either outspoken in their support of the dogmas or else entirely silent. No minister, no “orthodox” minister at least, stands up in his pulpit and says: “The old-fashioned heaven is a myth just as the old-fashioned hell is a myth”; and then goes on to explain what the new-fashioned heaven and the new-fashioned hell are like, if such realities are actually believed to exist. Youth hears but one side of the case, the old-fashioned heaven side and the old-fashioned hell side; but despite the outspokenness of the “orthodox” and the reluctant silence of the “heterodox,” it has a rather big and

growing suspicion that most of the clergy would like to forget or denounce both these dogmas—  
**IF THEY DARED.**

**IF THEY DARED!** But do they dare? The American pulpit is no guarantee of intellectual honesty and moral courage. Instead of these rugged qualities, one is quite likely to find “pious diplomacy.” It’s a poor substitute, and altogether unsatisfactory to the younger generation. But the shackles of medievalism still bind the clergy. Occasionally some daring spirit breaks loose, only to be speedily demoted to the ranks of the heretical and “dangerous.” The “middle-of-the-road” policy seems the only one guaranteeing absolute safety. And so the clergy of America, for the most part, stick to the middle of the road. And that is the one section of the road which youth doesn’t travel.

Silence on vital, or supposedly vital, questions of faith is the poorest kind of strategy. Outright intellectual honesty would save the situation. It would bring hosts of youthful recruits into the ranks; and, what is just as important, would save hosts of the older generation to the ranks.

One of the glaring faults of the clergy is to underestimate the intelligence of the average audience.

And the church needs recruits, needs them desperately. Needs them so desperately that it goes

to amazingly ridiculous extremes to get them. The old method was evangelistic campaigns. Hire a "professional" who has a reputation for "getting results." Give him full swing. Let him set up his complicated soul-winning machinery. Spend weeks in working the emotions of the community up to the point of instability. Advertise in the press the coming of this "phenomenon who has persuaded thousands to hit the saw-dust trail." Build a huge, barn-like auditorium. Install loud speakers. Get up a chorus of a thousand or so. Put on a big money-raising campaign. Guarantee all expenses. Concede to the evangelist's demand for a "free-will offering" at the end. See to it that this "free-will offering" is mostly signed up before it is taken. Make any and all concessions required. Then, at just the psychological moment, bring on the much-heralded spiritual magician. That was the old method and it used to work. The old method still persists, but it doesn't work with its old-time effectiveness. **SOMETHING HAS HAPPENED.** And the clergy and the church apparently haven't discovered just what that "something" is.

The evangelist is a heaven and hell expert. These medieval dogmas are a big part of his stock in trade. He has studied every conceivable method of putting them across with the greatest effective-

ness. If only people can be frightened into unreason, they will come trooping down the trail. "So, give them hell," I once heard one of these professionals say jestingly to another.

And the evangelist does "give them hell," hell of the old-fashioned, Jonathan Edwards' type. He gives everybody hell,—the clergy included. To heighten the dramatic effect, he insists that the clergy occupy the most conspicuous place on the platform, while he lambasts them and caricatures them to his heart's content. The audience roars. The clergy look sheepish. There they sit, poor, dumb "men of the cloth," while this devil-tamer strides back and forth, lashing and slashing like a maniac. And all for the glory of God. All to induce people to order their lives in accordance with the teachings of Jesus.

Out of sheer curiosity, I dropped into one of these modern, up-to-the-minute evangelistic meetings not long ago. I was sure their evils had been exaggerated; that they could not be as crude and primitive as I had been told they were. I was speedily disillusioned, and heartily ashamed of the whole deplorable performance.

As I arrived on the scene that night, the evangelist was in the edifying act of pitching the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Devil and striking him out

in one, two, three order. There was considerable applause as the gospel-pitcher wound up and "let her fly." A popular audience loves to be amused, even if the most sacred things have to be trailed in the dust. And why not? Its spiritual counselors were there to sanction the whole show. In fact, these spiritual counselors were responsible for the show, the advance agents of the show.

The subject of the sermon, if such verbal monkey-antics can be called a sermon, was "Heaven and Hell." The evangelist spoke as one having authority. He knew all about heaven, and he knew all about hell. He knew just who would go to heaven, and just who would go to hell. Heaven is a place somewhere in the upper regions reserved for the righteous. Hell is a place away down in some lower regions, the most devilish institution ever devised. And devised by God himself, mind you—by a God whose mercy is from everlasting to everlasting. This hell never kills its victims but, instead, increases their capacity to suffer the most untold agonies. It is a place so hot that "moulten lava would taste like ice cream." Once a person lands in that bottomless pit, there isn't the slightest chance of his ever getting out.

The evangelist—call him "Jasper" for short—gave a most picturesque presentation of the final

day of judgment. One after another, the souls of the newly departed appeared before the judgment bar of God. Jasper, as God's personal ambassador and adviser, was right on hand to give God any information he might need.

For a full hour the blasphemous proceedings continued. When the "sermon" was finished, there was a song by the big chorus, then an instrumental solo, and finally a touching vocal number designed to overpower the unstable emotions of the partially persuaded. Then came the passionate appeal to all who wanted to escape hell and go to heaven.

All through the vast audience, workers had been stationed to make individual appeals. These were to add the last ounce of emotionalism necessary to tip the balances.

"Hit the trail," shouted Jasper, "hit the trail while you have the chance!" And, to my amazement, some fifty or seventy-five people actually did hit the trail; but none of them—I took particular pains to note carefully—were of the younger generation. Six members of this younger generation sat right in front of me where I could observe the effects of the evangelist's lurid description of the place to which they would surely go if they did not do as he advised. These six giggled and chuckled throughout the whole performance.

"Better than a three-ring circus," I heard one of them remark. Another, a beautiful girl of perhaps nineteen or twenty, whispered to a friend, "Wonder if he thinks we're going to believe that sort of trash?"

That is how these representatives of the younger generation felt about this hideous gospel vaudeville. That is how the younger generation will continue to feel.

But, to me, the most tragic part of the whole wretched show was the fact that conspicuously seated on the platform from which the evangelist spoke were some forty or fifty clergymen—clergy-men of various denominations giving the evangelist and his rabid, Christless utterances the substantial backing of their presence.

The effect of this on the younger generation was precisely what might have been expected,—to drive home the growing conviction that the clergy are back numbers, the dupes of buffoonery, and the helpless bond-slaves of the past; that the church, for some unknown and inexplicable reason, is trying to perpetuate a lot of theological bunkum; and that the only place for sensible young people is outside the church.

And is the younger generation far wrong? If the older generation—happily, it is only a portion

of the older generation, and a fast diminishing portion at that—wants this sort of asinine performance, let the older generation have it. If it is willing to pay its precious shekels into the gaping money-bags of this type of professional evangelist who does his utmost to commercialize religion and to bring contempt upon the church, then so much the worse for the older generation. But let it not hope to recruit the church's depleting ranks with young people.

Young people are not going to sanction any such insane orgy in the name of religion. Despite the obstacles deliberately thrown in their way by the church; despite all the evil effects of clap-trap evangelism; despite everything, they have a really noble conception of the religion of Jesus. They haven't decided in their own minds just where they are coming out, but they are sure of one thing,—they are not going to be fooled by any religious showman who makes a business of shaking hands with God and slapping Jesus on the back. They are done with this wicked, nefarious, blasphemous thing, forever done with it. They have abandoned the old-fashioned hell. They have no desire to go to the old-fashioned heaven.

Why does the Christian church refuse to heed this mighty protest of youth,—all the mightier be-

cause it is unvoiced? Why does it insist on incorporating the thinking of medieval times, and with scarcely any revamping whatever, into the thought of today? Something is radically wrong with an institution which attempts any such audacious absurdity. As well try to substitute despotism for twentieth century democracy. The spirit of democracy, if nothing else, has banished the old-fashioned hell.

"Mr. Preacher," broke in an irate gentleman from the back pew after enduring in exasperated silence the type of sermon we have referred to, "Mr. Preacher, do you mean to say that a loving God is going to send millions of people to the everlasting damnation you tell about?"

"Most certainly I do," came the emphatic reply.

"Well, then," replied the other, "all I've got to say is that the people simply won't stand for it."

There is altogether too much democracy mixed with the blood of the younger generation to stand for that sort of thing,—too much democracy and too much common-sense.

The idea of hell was born of human vengeance just as the idea of immortality was born of love. Some place had to be provided for the wicked after death and, as defined by the church, the "wicked" included all the "unorthodox," saints and sinners.

Manifestly, that place must not be very desirable. In fact, the more undesirable it could be made, the greater would be the incentive for people to avoid it. And so theologians set to work with a vengeance. They created a hell which, for devilish ingenuity, is the supreme product of the human mind. And to this unspeakable region, they had a God of infinite love consign the wicked to everlasting torment. They divided and subdivided this hell of theirs into a number of huge compartments, some more hellish than others but all hellish enough to curdle the blood of any normal individual. These various compartments would provide for all classes of evil spirits, and were big enough to accommodate the erring of all ages even to the end of time.

The hell of Dante is the hell of medievalism; and it is some such hell as this which the church, in the name of the pure, compassionate and forgiving Jesus, has perpetuated,—is perpetuating today. But increasing millions no longer believe in it. Otherwise, the churches of the land would be overcrowded. Youth, in particular, does not believe in it, and is amazed to find the outworn dogma continued.

Robert G. Ingersoll, who unwittingly rendered the church as fine a service as any man ever ren-

dered it, once said, "The tears of pity have quenched the fires of hell." And Ingersoll was half right. The tears of pity, plus science and democracy and common-sense. Ingersoll literally ridiculed the idea of hell out of the minds of multitudes.

This medieval hell-idea was built upon a world-view which prevailed in prescientific times when the earth was conceived of as the real center of the universe; the heavens, a great canopy; the stars, lanterns hung out in the heavens by God; the sun and moon, fiery bodies drawn across the heavens by fiery steeds. Heaven, the future abode of the righteous, was naturally up, while hell, the future abode of the wicked, was just as naturally down somewhere in the deep bowels of the earth.

But that world-view has literally passed away. Science has consigned it to the scrap-heap. And yet—and this is the amazing thing—the church still preaches a hell, fashioned after this ancient and discarded cosmogony. Preaches it, and expects a science-saturated generation to accept it. And then wonders.

The time is long overdue for a real display of intellectual honesty and moral courage on the part of the church and its clergy.

Youth believes in heaven, if by that is meant

the continued spiritual existence of the righteous. It can discern no greater mystery in a continuance of life after death than in the mystery of life here and now. What particular form this continued life is to take, youth is not especially interested in attempting to determine. Whatever its form, it will doubtless be a progressive development of the divine potentialities of human nature. Youth is willing to leave all such matters to a God whose love and justice must be infinite.

And youth, likewise, believes in hell, though not in a medieval hell. It can see with its own eyes the kind of hell which evil-doing creates—the hell of a shattered body, of a diseased and disordered mind, of a dwarfed and paralyzed soul; the hell of remorse and anguish in which so many people are living at the present moment; the hell of the here and now, not the hell of the indefinite future. Youth has experienced for itself somewhat of this hell, and the conviction is becoming irresistible that any such torturous kind of hell is a thing to be avoided.

Youth recognizes that the violation of natural and spiritual laws brings penalties which people are compelled to pay, and that the fullest realization of LIFE is to be found by conforming to the laws of God. It believes that these laws are the

very essence of justice and not the enactments of vengeance. It believes that God suffers in all the sufferings of humanity, and that his forgiveness and mercy await every repentant soul. And it further believes that, whatever the mistakes and follies and blunders of people in this world, there will be no angry God at the end of the road to hand over his erring children to the endless torturings of some devil.

Such are the unescapable convictions of the younger generation—a generation which waits eagerly to have its convictions endorsed BY THE CHURCH.

Will the endorsement ever come?

## VII

### SOUNDING BRASS AND CLANGING CYMBALS

To vast numbers of young people, the Bible is like sounding brass and clanging cymbals. No book of riddles was ever more puzzling; no literature ever more mystifying. Happily, a great many have found their way out of this mocking and de-spiritualizing confusion. They have arrived at a satisfactory interpretation of the Bible. They have found it the most meaningful of all books. Others are on the way. But I am thinking now of those hosts of young people who are still in the dark, utterly bewildered and with only bewilderment ahead. If ever interpreters were needed, that time is now.

The church offers no satisfactory interpretation. It hands the younger generation a book and says: "This is God's holy word." And youth is expected to accept that dictum without questioning. This book, however, contains so much which has nothing to do with holiness, so much which apparently has no bearing whatever on religion, that multitudes are left in a quandary. Why is the Bible God's holy word? And is the whole Bible or only

parts of it holy? What is it that really makes a literature holy? If the church declares the Bible to be God's holy word, isn't it up to the church to make satisfactory explanations? The younger generation is in dead earnest in the matter. It wants interpreters who really are interpreters.

No dogma has so distorted the Bible and robbed it of its spiritual significance as the dogma of Infallibility—the dogma which holds that the Bible is historically and scientifically accurate throughout, even to the dotting of an *i* and the crossing of a *t*.

It is this kind of irrational doctrine against which science has had to war and is warring today. Infallibility means that the cosmogony of the Bible must be literally adhered to; that all the myths and folklore of the Bible must be regarded as facts; that all the miracles of both the Old Testament and the New must be adjudged authentic; that, regardless of what modern science may have to say, the dictum of the Bible is the only dictum to be considered.

The younger generation will have none of this. It has the utmost reverence and regard for things holy. It has no reverence and no regard for attempts to throttle modern times with the impossible verdicts of medievalism.

Why not state the actual truth?

*The Bible is a book of religion.* To judge it by any other standard is to do it the grossest injustice. It is no more a book of science than a book of poems is a book of science. The writers of the Bible knew nothing about science. That fact, however, did not prevent their knowing God and having the most vital religious experiences. Moses never once dreamed of a science called "geology," but that in no wise detracts from the soundness of his teachings as embodied in the decalogue. Isaiah knew nothing about modern astronomy, but he did know how to lay firm hold upon the fundamental principles of righteousness. Jeremiah had never heard of the law of gravitation, but he was quite familiar with the law of spiritual gravitation. The vigorous, timeless messages of this towering genius are just as forceful today as they would be had he been educated in a modern university. Jesus, doubtless, never imagined a day when men would map out the starry heavens, estimate to the exact second the time of a solar eclipse, or trace the course of a comet; but that does not in any wise invalidate his lofty conceptions of righteousness or the spiritual import of his teachings.

The Bible is not a book of science. It was never intended to be a book of science. To contend that it is a book of science is merely to continue a confusion that already has wrought havoc enough for

a dozen worlds like this. Why not be perfectly frank about the matter? Why fear to speak out when the younger generation is calling for a courageous facing of facts? Why be so alarmed about disturbing the faith of people who do not care to think scientifically and adventurously on questions of this nature? Why indulge in empty platitudes when the younger generation is demanding consistency?

I believe the big mission of the church of today is to convince the younger generation that the church is not an obsolete institution. I believe the big mission of the clergy of today is to convince the younger generation that the clergy are competent spiritual guides; for, on this point, the younger generation has come to have very serious doubts.

The Bible is a point at issue. Why not tell the plain, ungarnished truth about the Bible?

We call it a book. The fact is it is a *library* of sixty-six books. This library contains precisely the kind of literature which any well constituted library would naturally contain—history, philosophy, poetry, proverbs, allegories, dramas, sermons, myths and folklore.

Why not say it? Why insist on historical and scientific accuracy?

Suppose that a few thousand years from now another and more advanced civilization should dig up the civilization of today, and in some library should come across Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. And suppose this higher civilization should say, "What peculiar people those ancients must have been to believe the accounts of a book like this." Suppose this higher civilization were to insist that we of today must have accepted every statement in this book as literal history. Can one imagine anything more absurd? And yet that is precisely what hosts of people have done as respects the Bible. That is what the dogma of Infallibility means.

Take, for instance, the account of Joshua commanding the sun and moon to stand still. What are people in these times to do with that kind of talk? There's only one thing to do, if it be insisted that the Bible is an authentic record of actual happenings, and that is to regard at least this portion of the Bible as a huge joke. But let people understand that here is a portion of one of the inspiring anthems of the Hebrew people, and the situation is altogether different. Anthems are poetic, imaginative; they are not bound by the hard and fast laws of historical or scientific accuracy.

Charles S. Hall wrote, "John Brown's body lies

mouldering in the grave, but his soul goes marching on." Now, we don't have to believe that souls actually go marching around in order to get at the truth of Mr. Hall's statement. We understand exactly the idea he meant to convey. Likewise, the Hebrew people understood what was meant when one of their poets wrote: "Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon. And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the Lord harkened unto the voice of a man."

It was only another and more striking way of saying: "Everything is possible to the man of God. Nothing shall prevail against him."

Insist that the Bible's poetry be turned into scientific prose, and you rob it of all meaning.

And that is precisely what our unimaginative theologians have done. Blinded by the dogma of Infallibility, they have contended that this beautiful poetic passage must be regarded as literal history, even though, right in the heart of it, we are informed that it is copied from a book called *Jashar* which was a book of anthems.

The tragedy is that, by reason of all such irrational constructions, the Bible has to suffer in the

estimation of countless thousands. Instead of becoming increasingly meaningful, it becomes increasingly impossible.

But, despite what theologians may say, the younger generation proposes to exercise its own reverent common-sense.

Another dogma, closely aligned with the dogma of Infallibility, is the dogma of Inspiration. "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." Every sentence, therefore, between the covers of the Bible must have been divinely inspired. But a mere dip into the Old Testament discredits any such theory.

Suppose, for instance, that one dip into the first chapter of the book of Judges. He reads there how the Lord said unto Judah, "Behold, I have delivered the land into his hand;" how the Lord (surely not the God of Jesus) actually did deliver the Canaanites and the Perizzites into his hand; and how the armies of Judah—at the command of the Lord, mind you—slew a thousand of the enemy. Not satisfied with that, they captured Adonibesek and cut off his thumbs and great toes. Does any sane person actually believe that the God of Jesus inspired men to commit any such atrocious crimes, or that the God of Jesus inspired holy men, moved by the Holy Spirit, to write into the records

that he ordered any such wholesale slaughter? Not the younger generation surely. The younger generation does not choose to worship that kind of God.

If our theologians would only say for the benefit of the younger generation that the Bible is a book revealing the *progressive* development of a markedly religious people, and that all through the Bible one finds numerous indications that men's moral and spiritual ideals were pretty low in certain periods, the matter would be speedily cleared up, and the younger generation would be eternally thankful.

What the book of Judges clearly indicates is that, at the particular stage in man's development when this book was written, there seemed, even to the best of people, nothing whatever inconsistent in the Lord's doing precisely what he is said to have done. But we have long since passed that primitive stage. The spirit of the living God has guided us on to something better. Yes, and in these marvelous times is guiding us on to something still better. We are yet far from the goal, but we are on the way.

Why not say so?

The finest portions of the Bible bear indelibly the stamp of God's inspiration. So does all noble

literature. It is the spirit of God in the souls of men that makes literature noble. We must be forever done with the idea that inspiration and revelation are confined to the past. If ever God revealed himself to men, he is revealing himself in these epoch-making times. If ever men stood in his majestic presence, they are standing in his majestic presence today. Our laboratories are revealing him; the science of geology is revealing him; astronomy is proclaiming his glory and his power; every branch of natural science is discovering laws ordained by him; everywhere and in all things, men are face to face with a living God—a God who has ever revealed and is still revealing his eternal truths.

The younger generation will become God-conscious if given a chance.

Walt Whitman once said: "Today, I found letters from God dropped in the street and every one signed with God's name." That is the kind of spiritual insight of which our times stand desperately in need,—the insight which reveals God in the life of the HERE AND NOW.

The Bible is filled with inconsistencies only for him who regards it as an infallible book of science and history. It has no inconsistencies for him who regards it as a book of religion.

The younger generation insists on interpreting it as a book of religion.

It is forever done with the dogma of Infallibility.

It is forever done with the dogma of Inspiration if that dogma is to be charged with all that the Bible contains, and if it is to limit inspiration to the past alone.

It is forever done with SOUNDING BRASS AND CLANGING CYMBALS.

It is finding letters from God dropped in the street and every one signed with God's name.

But it passionately craves leadership.

It wants a rational, constructive interpretation of the Bible.

Who is to blaze the trail?

## VIII

### UNLOCKING THE MYSTERIES

WHO is to blaze the trail? That is the big question. Robert Robinson blazed the trail for me. He unlocked the mysteries of the Bible and gave me back the book I had lost, enhanced in value a thousand-fold. Had he been able to broadcast over a nation-wide radio hookup what he said to me on those memorable Sunday afternoons in the quiet of his library, I am convinced that he would have unlocked the mysteries of the Bible to tens of thousands of young men and women in America and set them straight in their thinking. And that just now is vitally essential.

If the Bible is to continue to be a force, and an increasing force, in American life, it must be read increasingly by the younger generation. A closed volume has no message. Never has the demand for competent interpreters been so insistent and the need of competent interpreters so imperative. The Christian church, in this respect, faces an unparalleled opportunity.

Ardent friends and lovers of the Bible have made

the Bible mean about everything it was never intended to mean. They have declared it to be an infallible book, a strictly historical book, the only God-inspired book. They have sought to set it apart from all other books and to elevate it to a place of supreme significance by proclaiming it to be, in every particular, A HOLY BOOK. They have insisted that every statement in this "infallible," "historical," "inspired," and "holy," book be taken at its face value. Despite its prescientific—and, therefore, unscientific—character, they have insisted that, from beginning to end, it is thoroughly scientific.

They have manufactured a literalism that has taken the very heart out of its most spiritual passages. They have turned allegories into history, poems into history, dramas into history, anthems into history—every line of every chapter, even to the headlines, into history. They have allowed themselves to be dominated by the primitive idea that unless a statement be historically and scientifically accurate it cannot be of God. They are bound to have God an historian and nothing else. No writer of fiction, this God of theirs; nor dramatist, nor story-teller. Just a plain, dependable historian who in olden times dictated statements which nobody has any right to question.

With almost dogged determination, they have ignored the manifest fact that a statement may be true without being historically true, that God may reveal himself in a simple sonnet as well as in the profoundest historical document, that this noblest of all literature came out of the souls of poets and prophets and dreamers as well as out of the souls of historians. They have overlooked the fact that if God is revealed in what is strictly historical, he may likewise be revealed in what is strictly poetic. They have quite forgotten that imagination is one of his priceless gifts,—this power to dream and to idealize and to venture into realms beyond the realms of fact.

They have done innumerable foolish and stupid things out of a deep and passionate regard for the Bible—because they actually revere and love the Bible. And the result? An impossible book. Impossible for youth, and impossible for increasing numbers of people everywhere, trained to scientific thinking. And, having done all these ridiculous things, they have done many more ridiculous things in attempting to get out of their ridiculous predicament. They have condemned science as the arch-enemy of religion, they have declared against historical research when the results of historical research have clashed with traditional views, they

have pronounced the findings of archæologists immaterial, they have even enacted laws against the teaching of evolution in our schools and colleges. They have done any number of inconsistent things in their futile efforts to defend their hopelessly inconsistent position.

And the Bible has survived. That is the amazing thing. The Bible has actually survived. But the Bible, none the less, has had to pay the price of misrepresentation. It has survived, but with the scars of battle upon it. Despite its unchallenged prestige, it has suffered heavy losses. The most widely circulated of all books, it is coming to be one of the least read of all books. Every home has a copy; some homes have several copies. Like amulets, these copies are supposed to possess a hidden charm. They produce an atmosphere of sanctity which even the most unsanctimonious enjoy breathing. They help to create an air of respectability and to tone up the surroundings generally. And respectable-looking they are, these copies of the Bible in our twentieth century homes. As immaculate as when they came from the press. No thumb-marked, dog-eared volumes for these modern, fastidious times. Immaculateness is a mark of godliness. But these immaculate volumes are closed volumes; and, so far as youth is con-

cerned, will remain closed—UNLESS SOMETHING HAPPENS.

It has long been the fashion for Christian people to think of themselves in the adventurous rôle of defenders. Defenders of the Bible? Sheerest nonsense. The Bible needs no defenders. Its own inherent worth commends it to every sane individual who has not been befogged and bewildered by the theories of its defenders.

But the befogged and bewildered hosts are legion. They include the younger generation. For this deplorable situation, the responsibility is divided. Theologians, shackled to the thought-categories of the Middle Ages, are responsible. The clergy are responsible. Christians who have accepted without questioning the impossible pronouncements of theologians and the clergy are responsible. Youth is simply the unfortunate victim of their literalistic and materialistic interpretations of a book whose value is to be found only in a spiritual interpretation.

Calling the moon “green cheese” doesn’t make the moon “green cheese”; and calling the Bible a thousand things which the Bible is not, doesn’t alter in any wise its real character. The time is long past due for Christian people to use a reasonable amount of spiritualized common-sense in

dealing with the Bible. Just spiritualized common-sense. One need not be an expert in theology to understand it, nor a scientist, nor even an historian. All that the Bible needs, and without which it is powerless to achieve its exalted mission, is a spiritual interpretation.

*A spiritual interpretation.* Nothing else matters. How can it make the slightest difference to anyone's religious faith whether the universe, for instance, was created in six ordinary, twenty-four-hour days or in a million or a trillion years?

Is the account of creation as given in Genesis historically true? Of course not. And if this account is not historically true, is that much of the Bible useless? Of course not. The Genesis account of creation is one of the sublimest poems ever conceived, and, *as a poem*, will outlive the ages. And it will outlive the ages because, in the very heart of it, is a great illuminating experience, an experience reproduced in countless lives and being reproduced in countless lives today. What is that experience? Just this—In the beginning God; and in all things, everywhere, God and his creative, transforming spirit. That is how the person or persons who conceived this poem felt about the universe. It was athrob with the spirit of God. With God left out of it, adequate and satisfactory

interpretations were impossible. With God at the very center of it, everything could be explained.

"In the beginning, God," sang these prescientific, unscientific bards of ancient times. And, "In the beginning, God," echoes the scientist of these modern days. Whether one think of the universe as having been constructed at a particular time by divine fiat or by the age-long process of evolution, makes absolutely no difference so far as this universal conviction is concerned. If by special creation, God was most assuredly there. If by evolution, God was just as assuredly there; and continues to be there in the still unfolding processes. Science has never thought of denying the presence and creative power of a Supreme Being. It traces the development of the universe back as far as it can and then says,—"In the beginning, God." But it adds to this conviction another conviction which requires increasing emphasis today,—"In the present, God; and in the ages yet to come, God." So far as conceiving of a God at the very center of things is concerned, the Bible and science speak the same language.

That is the important thing,—the one tremendous fact of surpassing value—the fact of a God in the universe, present everywhere in nature and in human nature. The God-idea throbs in every line

of the creation account in Genesis. And the God-idea likewise throbs in every proclamation of modern science. "Special Creation," declares the Bible in its efforts at interpretation. "Evolution," answers science. And by "Evolution" science means, in the words of Le Conte, "continuous, progressive change, according to certain laws, and by means of resident forces." But here is the important fact—embodied in these two very divergent accounts, is the overwhelming conviction of a God who creates, orders and controls. The Genesis poem of creation has value for people living today, not because its statements are scientifically accurate, but because it describes in the clearest possible manner a mighty, reproducible experience,—the experience of a God in the universe.

Present Genesis to the younger generation after that fashion, and you find a hearty and enthusiastic response. All difficulties immediately disappear. There are no inconsistencies, no irreconcilables, no impossibles. The ancients were simply proclaiming in the childish thought-categories of their times the same abiding truth which science is proclaiming in the more mature thought-categories of our times. Young people are quick to sense the situation, to see how science and religion are not implacable enemies, but staunch and indefatigable

allies. As a result, the Genesis account of creation becomes one of the most thrilling and adventurous records of the Old Testament. Incidentals are seen as incidentals, while the one great essential—the concept of a God at the center of things—dominates the consciousness and captivates the imagination. This marvelous, reproducible experience, spiritual and universal, makes Genesis one of the invaluable books of the present as well as of the past—more vital and meaningful to the present than ever it was to the past.

The Bible demands a SPIRITUAL interpretation. Nothing else will suffice. And a spiritual interpretation of the Bible means just this: that people shall find in its records of experiences which have illumined and glorified the souls of men in the past a spirit capable of a like, or even greater, illumination and glorification in the present. The supreme value of the Bible for our generation lies in the fact that the spiritual experiences it relates are capable of being *re-experienced* here and now.

RE-EXPERIENCED HERE AND NOW. There is the crux of the matter.

I recall clearly my own misgivings as to the book of Jonah. The early misgivings of most people begin with Jonah. Despite, what seemed to me, the exercise of an abundant faith, I found myself

feeling that the account wouldn't stand too close inspection. And there was no one to offer me a rational interpretation,—no one to rescue this Bible of mine from destruction. Result? One of the choicest and most significant bits of literature in the Old Testament became to me a stumbling-block, a veritable Jonah indeed. If only someone had said to me then: "Here is a book at the heart of which is a mighty transforming experience. Your business is to discover that experience and to duplicate it in your own life." But, no. I was admonished to exercise my faith and to believe that all things are possible with God.

The tragedy of it! Why not say frankly to inquiring youth: As a record of actual happenings, the book of Jonah means absolutely nothing. But, as an allegory, it is one of the most illuminating portions of the Bible. A more vital message has never been burned into the consciousness of the race—YOU CAN'T GET AWAY FROM GOD.

This book is a real landmark in religious experience. People used to think of escape from God as a comparatively easy thing. Just get out of your God's territory and over into some other God's territory. Perfectly simple. Merely a matter of crossing boundary lines. God's jurisdiction is limited just as the jurisdiction of the United

States or Canada is limited. On this side of an imaginary line, his word is law; on that side, it carries with it no authority whatever. That is how the early Hebrews felt about it. And their feeling was perfectly natural.

But that childish idea had to go. The time came when someone saw a great light. He tried to flash that light to all the world, but theologians blew out his flickering torch; and the light that might have been became darkness. They blew out his flickering torch and utterly spoiled one of the finest bits of literature in existence. Literalism has blown out many a torch that should have burned with increasing brightness.

Who the author of Jonah was, nobody knows; but, whoever he was, he had laid firm hold on a great idea,—“There is just one God and he is the God of the whole universe. From his presence, there is no escape.”

That was an epoch-making discovery. It gradually came to change the whole of a people’s thinking about God and his relation to humanity. The author of Jonah ought to have a big share of the credit for this revolutionary conception, and he would have except for our absurd literalism. But he isn’t the only one whom literalism has robbed. Its robberies cover the centuries.

See how ingeniously this ancient author went about his task. He had an idea and he wanted to get it across. But one can't always get an idea across merely by stating it. Ordinary prose may be altogether too prosaic for the general public. That is why we have dramas, and allegories, and legends, and poems, and myths. Every person has an imagination and likes to use it. Story-tellers have always been popular. The author of Jonah was a good story-teller; and so he decided to put across his idea in an allegory. He never dreamed that literalists would one day take all the snap out of his big literary effort. But they did. Trust literalists, past and present, to take the snap and meaning out of anything.

This is how our author worked out his illuminating message. Every thrilling tale has to have a hero. In this case, Jonah was made the hero. He was to be the flesh-and-blood representative of the old idea of a territorial God,—a God powerless beyond the boundaries of a certain prescribed territory. The Jehovah of the early Hebrews was conceived of as that kind of God. He could rule his own people with an iron hand, but he couldn't rule anybody else.

Jehovah gave Jonah a commission. It wasn't to Jonah's liking. So he decided to make a dash

for liberty. The author's account is a classic: "Now, the word of God came unto Jonah, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness is come up before me. But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish *from the presence of the Lord*; and he went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish *from the presence of the Lord*."

But Jonah's getaway wasn't as successful as he supposed. The Lord caught a glimpse of him as he stepped down into that ship, and determined to teach him and all people a never-to-be-forgotten lesson. He waited until the fugitive was well out to sea and then whipped up the most tempestuous kind of tempest. Everybody on board expected to go down with the ship unless the God responsible for the storm could be appeased.

Back in those days, they had a custom of casting lots. This casting of lots was to discover the guilt or innocence of a person. As fate would have it, the lot fell to Jonah. Jonah, a thorough believer in the efficacy of lot-casting, immediately confessed himself the culprit. There was only one thing to do—throw the culprit overboard. This done, the wild sea suddenly became a great calm.

But the Lord had no intention of letting Jonah drown. He merely wanted to teach him a lesson—wanted to get out of his head this old, silly territorial idea of God. So he had a big fish waiting to swallow him. For three whole days and nights, Jonah remained swallowed. That gave him ample time to think things over. Finally, in obedience to the commands of the Lord, the fish headed for shore and landed the runaway at almost the exact spot from which he had so recently departed. And Jonah was quick to grasp the idea that God is the God of the whole universe, and that fleeing from his presence is one of the great impossibles.

A simple allegory, and as profound as it is simple. A story that will live as long as the Bible lives. The writer of this story is one of the real spiritual benefactors of the race. He was saying in those far-away times what everybody in these times recognizes to be true—"YOU CAN'T GET AWAY FROM GOD. There is no escaping his presence. He is everywhere. The surest way to find peace and happiness is to conform to his will. Any other course is folly."

The author made everything perfectly clear. The wayfaring man, though a fool, should not have erred therein. But literalism got in its deadly work and one of the most spiritually illuminating

books ever written became the butt of ridicule.

Say that to youth, and youth's reaction will be immediate and whole-hearted.

So one might analyze practically every story of the Bible, and find in it some vital experience capable of being re-experienced in the present. Allegory and legend and fable and fiction and drama unite with history and philosophy in the Bible's pages in portraying the march of the soul on toward God, and in the disclosure of spiritual laws operating with the same exactness as natural laws. A legend may be just as inspired as history, just as inspired and oftentimes more inspiring. One has only to look out upon the face of nature to understand that God is poet and artist as well as historian. His revelations are for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear.

The younger generation awaits eagerly the unlocking of the Bible's mysteries.

## IX

### AN ABRIDGED BIBLE

My own experience, in having my faith in the Bible shattered and then in finding my way out into a larger and more abundant faith, has convinced me that one of the finest things for the younger generation would be an abridged Bible. I was fortunate in meeting, at just the crucial time, a wise and sympathetic spiritual counselor. Many others have not been so fortunate. Their shattered faith is still shattered, and the road ahead appears anything but promising. An abridged Bible would be a mighty help.

If those of the younger generation who have found their way to a satisfactory interpretation of the Bible were to make a suggestion to the clergy of America, their suggestion would doubtless run something like this: "Reduce the Bible to a book of possibly two or three hundred average pages. Preface it with a clear, sane, up-to-date, interpretative chapter. Make this chapter so luminous that youth will be fascinated by it. Stress, and keep on stressing, the fact that the Bible is a BOOK OF

RELIGION, and is not to be judged by any other standard. Say frankly—the younger generation is eager to hear you say it—that the science of the Bible is not our science; nor the astronomy of the Bible, our astronomy; nor the cosmogony of the Bible, our cosmogony; nor the miracles of the Bible, our miracles. Say just as frankly that the religion of the Bible, as that religion finds its consummation in the character and teachings of Jesus, *is our religion.*

"Burn into the mind of the younger generation the fact that the Bible's spiritual value is to be found in its records of experiences capable of being re-experienced by humanity today.

"Be clear, concise, passionately in earnest, frank to the last degree. Don't sidestep. Don't dodge the issue. Don't be alarmed over what the younger generation will think. The younger generation has done more thinking on these subjects than most people have any idea of. Don't be so tactful and diplomatic that nobody can be quite sure just what you're getting at. Don't be afraid of shocking youth. Youth is a great shock-absorber. Do away with this taboo that has robed impossible doctrines in the garments of sanctity and perpetuated some of the grossest errors by calling them 'sacred.' Just treat youth, in all these matters, as

you would like to be treated. And you will experience one of the big surprises of your life. Youth is ready, over-ready. And the wait has been a long one."

Large portions of the Bible are about as interesting and intelligible to the younger generation as an encyclopedia written in Egyptian hieroglyphics. As a lad of twelve, I set out to read the Bible straight through from beginning to end. It was the conventional thing for boys and girls in that community to do. Everybody ought to be familiar with "God's Holy Word." So our elders counseled.

I recall that experience with painful reluctance. It was one of those never-to-be-forgotten tragedies that are forever taking the joy out of life. Of all the tiresome, monotonous, boring, excruciating experiences I ever went through, that particular one stands out in my memory as a top-notcher. To tell the truth, I never finished the job. But I did come to the very definite conclusion that God must be a peculiar sort of individual—quite a barbarian to begin with, but gradually becoming more civilized as time went on; the most uninteresting author I had ever come across, and a mighty poor judge of the kind of "stuff" boys and girls like. What normal youngster wouldn't get some such impression?

If you want that child of yours to become hopelessly befuddled; if you want to kill outright or, at least, smother, any spiritual aspirations he may have; if you want him to get the idea that religion is inevitably irksome, that the realms of the spiritual are dungeons, and that the rewards of the righteous are only penalties in disguise,—if you want to do all this and more for your child, just set him to reading the Bible through “from cover to cover.” You will go far toward curing him of ever wanting to be religious. It was that way with me. It is decidedly more that way with boys and girls today. For youth has caught the spirit of a new age.

How different would have been my impressions of the Bible had I been given an abridged edition, carefully compiled, with copious notes and rational explanations. But, no. The entire Bible, from the title of the first book to the “Amen” of the last, was holy. Holiness is a good thing for everybody and especially for mischievous, prone-to-wander, always-getting-into-trouble youngsters. If little doses are good, big doses are better. Therefore, the **WHOLE BIBLE**.

And I have the suspicion that most of these conscientious guardians of my spiritual interests had never, even in maturer years, done the thing which

they recommended to me. Had they done it, they would have been a trifle more cautious. We censor the modern novel, we censor the motion-picture, we censor the legitimate drama, we censor almost everything, but, in our holy zeal, we have never thought of censoring the Bible. Never thought of it. But the Bible, if it is to be placed indiscriminately in the hands of boys and girls, and if these same boys and girls are to read it through, needs the most careful kind of censoring. Of course, it is all well enough if one understands it; but boys and girls cannot be expected to understand. Any book that calls for an interpreter is dangerous without an interpreter. The Bible is no exception. I shall carry with me to the grave some of those early impressions when I came across passages which even modern sex-conscious novelists would hesitate to write. And these impressions were so utterly needless.

The way out is comparatively simple. Give the younger generation an abridged Bible. Cut out the corrupt and suggestive portions. These represent only passing phases of a people's progress. Eliminate those long, despiritualizing genealogical tables. Strike out the tiresome lists of kings, the chapters and whole books dealing with ceremonial laws, and those other portions regulating, to the minutest

detail, every aspect of an ancient people's life. Youth cares nothing about all this. None but scholars care anything about it. Leave to scholars the Bible as it stands. But give to youth an abridged Bible.

Say to youth—"Here, in this little volume, is the essence of the whole Bible, all that has any real religious significance, all that is necessary to make it a competent guide to the spiritual realities of life. Here you will see the gradual development of the finest ideals of our civilization, the transfiguring power of the spirit of God in the souls of men, the slow but steady progress of the race onward and upward forever. Here you will become acquainted with some of the noblest souls of the ages; and, noblest of them all, Jesus of Nazareth. Take this little volume and read it through. You will find it worth your while. It is the choicest product of the centuries."

Say that to youth, and youth will not waste any time looking for excuses. The younger generation is not confused because it wants to be confused, nor indifferent to things spiritual because it wants to be indifferent. It has simply faced necessities and rendered its verdict. Until something happens that verdict stands. But perfect frankness, particularly in matters religious where

frankness is so often conspicuous for its absence, will make its own magic appeal, and the response of youth will be whole-hearted and genuine. Never doubt it. Youth is incurably religious. It honestly wants co-operation. It is in persistent quest of a rational and indestructible faith.

"You are mistaken," replies the traditionalist. "Youth is not so eager about religious affairs as you imagine. Do precisely what you suggest, and the present attitude of youth toward religion and the church would not change appreciably. No, the trouble is with the times, friend. The times are unspiritual. Everybody is worshipping the god of prosperity and the goddess of success. A materially-minded generation is rushing on to inevitable doom. Make no mistake about it. It is just the spirit of the times, friend,—just the spirit of the times."

That, or something like that, is what the traditionalist has nearly always said. And that is why youth has been so reluctant to make suggestions.

My own experience runs contrary to any such verdict. I know the spiritual ordeals I went through in finding my way out of this modern-day labyrinth of doubts and fears. I know the ordeals through which a good many others of my generation have passed and are passing today. Of course,

we may be exceptions; but I do not believe it. I know that youth wants an honest hearing, wants to have its own feelings and convictions given at least some slight consideration, wants to be treated as intelligent human beings have a right to be treated, wants a dependable religious faith.

Up to the present, the protest of youth has been, for the most part, an unvoiced protest. Youthless churches, depleted Bible schools, Young People's Societies deserted—that is youth's protest. A rather drastic protest, any unprejudiced person will admit. And a protest that ought to be heeded. But, instead of taking this protest at its face value, the church has indulged in all sorts of ingenious explanations, conjured up all manner of impossible interpretations, and absolved itself from all blame for a state of affairs which it admits to be "deplorable." And youth waits eagerly, if distrustingly, for something to happen.

But let the younger generation take heart. Listen to this: "Our earth is degenerate. There are signs that the world is speedily coming to an end. Children no longer obey their parents. Every man wants to write a book. The end of the world is evidently approaching."

Surely a gloomy verdict. And who is this prophet of hopelessness? Some modern, dyed-in-

the-wool pessimist? Some sociologist who has dealt for long years with the seamy side of life? Some millennialist who anticipates a sudden and complete social and spiritual revolution? It might have come from any of these. It might have come from any number of other sources. But, the fact is, no modernist is responsible for this particular utterance. It is a voice out of the past, the settled conviction of a representative of an ancient civilization. It was inscribed on an Assyrian tablet 2800 years before Christ. The author of it was convinced that human affairs had just about reached the last stage of demoralization. He could see no promise of improvement. Humanity had proved itself utterly hopeless. And yet nearly 5000 years after this gloomy prophecy was rendered, we find, unquestionably, a better world, a nobler civilization, innumerable evidences of genuine progress, a future in which everybody believes; and believes passionately.

The prophet of gloom is never to be trusted. Nothing can so distort one's vision and judgment as a bad case of "blues." The pessimist has a way of magnifying every mole-hill of evil into a mountain, while every mountain of good speedily dwindle, by some strange magic, into the merest mole-hill. Unconsciously, the pessimist denies that God rules in the affairs of men.

It would be interesting to compare this ancient verdict with the verdict which youth in that same period would have rendered. But youth's verdict is not a matter of record. It takes no very great stretch of the imagination, however, to surmise what it would have been. Youth is irresistibly optimistic. Its verdict would have been the verdict of confident optimism.

But even confident optimism is not equal to every emergency. The younger generation just now faces an emergency. It wants counsel and assistance—counsel that is not condescension, and assistance that is something more than sympathetic indulgence. At this particular juncture in the spiritual affairs of youth, the church might do a number of things that would be of immeasurable service. One of these things is the compilation of an abridged Bible.

This abridged Bible, as we have indicated, would have an introductory chapter which would be a real key to a modern and scientific interpretation of Bible literature. It would be supplied with abundant notes and explanations. It would eliminate very large portions of the Old Testament, in some cases whole books, confining itself to passages with a manifest spiritual message. It would retain the stirring, gripping stories of Israel, beginning with the story of creation; snatches here

and there from the historical books, starting with Joshua and continuing through Nehemiah; practically the whole of the books of Jonah and Esther and Job; the Psalms, with the imprecatory passages omitted; a big portion of the book of Proverbs; the whole of Ecclesiastes; a few sentences from the Song of Solomon; paragraphs, and occasionally full chapters, from the writings of the major and minor prophets. It would also retain, of course, the larger part of the New Testament, placing special emphasis upon the words and discourses of Jesus. It would eliminate genealogical tables, portions of the letters of Paul, a part of the epistle to the Hebrews, all but a few chapters of the Book of Revelation, besides verses and groups of verses here and there throughout. Without sacrificing anything essential, it would be clear, understandable and gripping from the first word to the last.

The younger generation would revel in that sort of Bible. And if it could feel that such an abridged Bible had the sincere endorsement of the Christian church, it would revel in it still more. That is one of the "SOMETHINGS" which youth would like to see happen.

But don't neglect that introductory chapter with its illuminating interpretation. And, right in the heart of it, write out in bold, challenging characters

these words: "*The Christian is the person who honestly tries to live out the spirit and the teachings of Jesus. Nothing more. Nothing less.*"

If that fact can be driven deep enough into the consciousness of the younger generation, the situation is saved.

An abridged Bible is bound to come.

Who is to be the everlasting benefactor of youth? \*

\* Cf. *The Living Word*, by Henry Hallam Saunderson.

## X

### THE GOD OF THE YOUNGER GENERATION

THE person who remarked, "My conception of God is a huge, oblong blur," quite accurately summed up the mental complex of multitudes of the younger generation. Not all of the younger generation, however. Increasing hosts are finding their way into the ranks of the intellectually and spiritually emancipated; and, to these newly emancipated hosts, God is vastly more than a huge, oblong blur. He is a living, vitalizing personality—mind, spirit, energy—present everywhere and in all things, the great OVERSOUL in whom every individual soul lives and moves and has its being.

Youth is not particularly interested in attempting to define God. It knows that even the most comprehensive definitions must prove altogether inadequate. But it is interested, and tremendously interested, in working out certain concepts of God which, however vague and unsatisfactory, seem infinitely less vague and unsatisfactory than the concepts it has been forced to abandon.

Take, for instance, the concept of a personal

God. It is oftentimes charged that the God of modern youth is fast losing every vestige of reality; that science has made of him a mere abstraction where once he was a living, personal presence. The younger generation regards this charge as wholly unwarrantable. Far from bowing God out of the universe, science is literally persuading, guiding, compelling the younger generation into the RECOGNIZED PRESENCE of God.

To be sure, modern youth has abandoned the concept of God as person, but it has by no means abandoned the concept of a personal God. It cannot abandon the concept of a personal God, for it is compelled to think of God in terms of human experience, and *the personal* is a very important item in human experience; in fact, the biggest of all items—so big that, without it, all other items immediately lose their significance and their value.

Naturally, a disembodied personality is somewhat more difficult to visualize and make real than an embodied personality. That is why the God of modern youth is not the very definitely *defined* God of the youth of former generations. But a thing need not be defined to be experienced. And youth just now is vastly more interested in experiencing God than in defining him.

Personality implies attributes. Without per-

sonality, attributes are inconceivable. This is another reason why the God of the younger generation is a personal God. A God without moral attributes would be unthinkable. A God who is not the incarnation of the highest moral attributes would be undesirable. And so, however indefinite and hazy its concept of God, youth finds it necessary to ascribe to God what is fundamental to its concept of human life—both personality and moral attributes. And since, in the judgment of youth, the personality and the attributes of Jesus are the finest achievements of the race, youth inevitably thinks of God in terms of the personality and the attributes of Jesus.

Another thing. The God of former generations was a more or less absentee God, dwelling in the upper heavens, and ruling the universe according to his own whims and caprices—changing, vacillating, undependable. The God of modern youth is imminent; his reign is the reign of universal, impartial, and unalterable law; he is changeless, undeviating, dependable. Here, surely, is a very decided and immeasurable gain.

And along with this concept goes another—God has his limitations. He is limited by his attributes to definite and unvarying courses of conduct. He is not all-powerful in the sense that he can do any-

thing and everything. There are innumerable things which he cannot do. Men practice deception, lie, steal, plunder, murder. Manifestly, God cannot do these things though men once believed he could. Men make all manner of mistakes, commit all manner of follies and blunders. God cannot make mistakes, cannot commit follies and blunders. His attributes prevent it. Men become vain, egotistical, tyrannical. But this is impossible with God. Men are oftentimes unjust and cruel and treacherous. God is limited by the laws of his being to the practice of truth and justice and righteousness.

This leads inevitably to a conclusion that has had a marked influence on the thinking of the younger generation—the conclusion that **GOD HAS NO CHOICE**.

**GOD HAS NO CHOICE.** People used to think that God could choose between one course of action and another. He could choose between the practice of good and the practice of evil, between being a loving Father and being an unmitigated savage, between doing deeds of justice and doing deeds of rankest injustice, between being everything righteous, and being everything unrighteous. The God of former times was simply the conscience and consciousness of those times infinitized, just as the

God of our times is the conscience and consciousness of our times infinitized.

*Every age has created, every future age will continue to create, its God in its own spiritual image.* The finer the spiritual image of man, the finer the spiritual image which man ascribes to God.

That is why Jesus' concept of God was not the concept of the Egyptian bond-slave. Only a barbarous God could have done the things which the early God of the Old Testament is said to have done. Only an immoral God, judged by today's standards of morality, could have sanctioned in his saints the deeds which the early God of the Old Testament is represented to have sanctioned. Only a murderous God could have tortured and massacred men, women, and children indiscriminately as the early God of the Old Testament is declared to have tortured and massacred. By no possible stretch of the imagination, can we conceive of the God of Jesus conducting himself as the early God of the Old Testament is said to have conducted himself. The God of the early Hebrews reflected the character and ideals of the early Hebrews. The God of Jesus reflected the character and ideals of Jesus. That is the only difference between the two; but it is an immeasurable kind of difference.

It was only a couple of hundred years ago that devout Christians in America burned witches at the stake. And they did this in conscientious service of their God. They actually believed that God, not only sanctioned, but commanded that sort of thing. But the concept of a witch-burning God had to go. An enlightened conscience demanded it.

In the middle of the last century, half the clergy of America and, with them, their congregations, were searching the Bible to prove that God sanctioned slavery. And they could prove it. One can prove anything in the matter of conduct from the Bible if he knows just where to turn, for the Bible is a record of *progressive* revelation and development. These clergy and their congregations were devout Christians. But they had not developed beyond a slave-holding concept of God.

Devout Christians today, plenty of them, sanction the barbarous institution of war. Passionately, they implore their God, just as the early Hebrews did, to overwhelm their enemies and to crown their own standards with success. They engage in deeds of "necessary" barbarism and are confident they have the backing of God. They see no inconsistency in their thinking or in their actions. But not many generations hence Christian people will look back on us and our concepts of God with much the same feeling of wonderment

as we now look back on the early Hebrews and their concepts of God. It is all a matter of spiritual progress. The finer spiritual development of the future will ascribe to God a finer spiritual image. It always has been so and it always will be so.

God is limited by the laws of his being to certain unalterable courses of conduct. He has no choice. A God of love cannot be a God of hatred; nor a God of justice, a God of injustice; nor a God of compassion, a God of cruelty. He is the same—yesterday, today, and forever. It is only the concepts men have of him that change, and change continually.

“Choice,” as the younger generation sees it, is not an evidence of strength, but an evidence of weakness. It is one of humanity’s ear-marks. Humanity is compelled to choose because it is not all-wise and all-good.

A child comes to its father and makes a request, and the father finds himself in a difficult situation. A vital question has been raised—one that may affect for weal or woe the whole future of his child. He is compelled to choose between two courses. Finally, he makes his decision. The decision turns out to be wrong, and his child travels the road to ruin. Had he been wise enough, had he been

able to look even a few brief years into the future, he would have had no choice to make on that fatal day. But, not being wise enough, he was compelled to choose, and his power of choice resulted in a disastrous decision. God, according to the concept of modern youth, has no such "power" of choice and, therefore, makes no such disastrous decisions. His wisdom marks out clearly the only right course to follow.

One other important item in the younger generation's concept of God has to do with the theory of evolution. Evolution, youth firmly believes, is explaining God as he has never been explained before.

"God created man in his own image," declares the Bible. And science, whose spirit is the spirit of youth, gives this Bible declaration its hearty endorsement. Science recognizes the potential godlikeness of human nature just as many people of Bible times recognized it; in fact, recognizes it far better than people of Bible times ever recognized it.

"Special Creation" or "Evolution"—all is the same so far as the potential godlikeness of human nature is concerned. Evolution, however, pays a much more glowing and effective tribute to God than does Special Creation. For, according to the

Special Creation theory, man was made perfect to begin with, only to fall from his high estate before the forces of evil. According to the theory of Evolution, man was not created perfect, but for ages has been evolving, through one stage after another, toward perfection.

Special Creation has God defeated by the Devil right at the outset. Evolution has God and his spiritual laws forever winning out.

Special Creation puts man today infinite leagues from the perfection with which he began. Evolution puts him infinite leagues nearer the perfection towards which he presses his desperate and persistent way.

Special Creation is essentially a theory of despair and distrust and pessimism. Evolution, one of hope and confidence and optimism.

Special Creation, time and again, has been put to the necessity of explaining the apparently disastrous defeats of God. Evolution is always and forever proclaiming his triumphs.

Special Creation apologizes. Evolution has no apologies to offer.

When it comes to honoring God by our theories, the advantages are all on the side of Evolution. At least, that is the judgment of the younger generation.

Vague and unsatisfactory as are youth's ideas of God, they are, nevertheless, proving more real and satisfactory than the traditional ideas which youth has abandoned.

They are making God appear increasingly understandable.

They are eliminating the irksome and despiritualizing necessity of explaining away inconsistencies and of attempting to reconcile irreconcilables.

They are bringing God out of the far-off reaches of time and space into the actual here and now—flooding the whole universe with the light of his glorious presence.

They are doing away with the old, confusing concept of a God of caprice and chaos, and are substituting in its place the new and challenging concept of a God of law and order.

They are turning abstractions into living realities.

No, the younger generation is neither atheistic nor agnostic. It believes profoundly in God, and its faith increases with the passing of the years.

The quest of God has come to seem the most adventurous and rewarding quest conceivable.

## XI

### ALL PEOPLE PRAY AND ALL PRAYERS ARE ANSWERED

HAS prayer gone out of fashion with the younger generation?

Some say, "Yes"; others say, "No."

What does the younger generation, itself, say?

Well, it all depends on what one means by prayer. If prayer is thought of primarily as voiced petition, then, doubtless, it is not as much in fashion today as formerly. But if prayer is thought of as conscious effort at real communion with the Infinite, a genuine striving to get at the deeper meaning of life and to realize life's greater spiritual objectives, then prayer, instead of going out of fashion with the younger generation, is undoubtedly coming more and more into fashion.

Youth's concepts of God necessarily determine in very large measure its concepts of prayer. What some of these concepts are, we have endeavored to indicate in the preceding chapter. They all have a very definite bearing upon our modern Christian conception of prayer—upon youth's conception of prayer.

Someone has defined prayer as "the soul's sincere desire, unuttered or expressed." That is prayer, though not always the noblest and truest kind of prayer; for "the soul's sincere desire" may be utterly at variance with the purposes of God. That is why so many prayers are not answered as people would like to have them answered.

The primitive idea of prayer was to procure something for nothing (or for very little), to strike a shrewd bargain with the Almighty, to achieve by magic what otherwise might require years of tedious and sacrificial effort, to escape the just penalty of violated laws, to secure a favorable verdict from the highest spiritual court regardless of the merits of one's case. And this primitive idea of prayer is by no means obliterated. It still continues to fashion the prayers of multitudes of Christian people. But not the prayers of the younger generation. The younger generation, saturated with the spirit of science, finds every such concept of prayer not only untenable but altogether undesirable.

Prayer, as modern youth is coming to conceive of it, is not just pleading with God to grant certain favors and exemptions. That is the cheapest kind of prayer. This idea of prevailing upon God has given way to the idea of prevailing upon one's self.

It is not God's attitude towards the individual that is to change but the attitude of the individual towards God. Prayer is the means by which the change is wrought. Here is the crux of the whole matter. The prayer of the Christian should be a noble, sacrificial effort to discern the will of God and to bring his own life into conformity to that will. It may take the form of petition or confession or thanksgiving or adoration. It may be voiced or unvoiced; conscious or unconscious. But, whatever its form or however it may find expression, it is a vital contact of soul with soul, of spirit with spirit. It is communion of the finite with the Infinite.

Robertson of Brighton once said: "Prayer is an attempt to bring the will human into submission to the will divine rather than an attempt to bring the will divine into submission to the will human." Robertson was a spiritual genius and his definition of prayer has never been surpassed. It is a sentence out of his own deep and tragic experience.

Most prayers are not of this sort, and they are not of this sort because most souls are not in the same stage of development as was the soul of Robertson. We pray for all sorts of foolish and absurd things. We strive to bring the will divine into submission to the will human or to convince

ourselves that the will human is the will divine. We expect, somehow, that the God of the whole universe is going to alter his conduct to suit our convenience. We implore him to do things which, by the exercise of a reasonable amount of spiritual discipline, we could do for ourselves. But discipline is hard. Praying is easy. So we pass up discipline and pray.

We pray; and many of our prayers are cheap prayers offered for cheap ends. They are answered, to be sure, cheap prayers and all. Every prayer is answered. But every prayer is not answered in just the fashion we would have it answered. That is what saves the day for us. Were all our prayers to be answered as we would have them answered, our troubles would be endless. But God is a loving Father. He allows us to keep on praying our childish prayers in the knowledge that some day our spiritual discernment will make it impossible for us longer to offer such prayers. We learn by experience. We are taught by foolish, blundering prayers as well as by prayers that are wise and worthy the best that is in us.

All people pray and all prayers are answered,—all people, not just some people; all prayers, not just some prayers. The deepest motive of a person's life is his prayer, voiced or unvoiced. Some-

times it is a conscious prayer; many times an unconscious prayer.

The thief plots to enrich himself at the expense of others. His prayer is a prayer of criminal selfishness and the answer to it is moral degradation.

A man is dominated by the spirit of hatred. He devotes himself systematically and unreservedly to revenge. Revenge finally drives him mad. He murders another. The answer to his prayer of revenge is unending anguish and remorse.

The profligate gives himself over to carnal passion. To satisfy this passion, he sacrifices everything. He prays his prayer of degeneracy. The answer comes in lost mentality, warped moral judgment, disease and untimely death.

All people pray and all prayers are answered.

I am told that in a certain university center, there stands a noble building where thousands of young men and women have found friendship, joy, and wholesome recreation. On a tablet in one corner of this building is an inscription. It reads: "Dedicated by a mother to those who need a mother's love."

Back of this inscription is the story of a transfigured life. This mother was once known as a society belle. "Society" was her first and overwhelming interest. She had wealth—plenty of

it. She wanted life, and an ever-increasing abundance of life; and she was endeavoring to find this abundance in "society." Her quest was, manifestly, a blundering quest.

She had an only son. The time came when this son left home for the university. In his first year, he fell victim to a grievous disease. The mother forgot all about "society." She prayed; prayed through torturous days and endless nights. But death was inevitable. The mother felt that her prayer was denied. In reality, it was answered. Her real prayer, her unconscious prayer, was for abundance of life. The death of her son brought her to a complete new understanding of the deeper meaning of life, and gave to the world a woman of rare spiritual endowments,—gave to thousands of young men and women an environment that has meant salvation.

All people pray and all prayers are answered.

The righteous pray. Wise prayers, some of them; foolish prayers, many of them. But all prayers, whether wise or foolish, are answered. The real prayer of a person's life is not always the prayer he thinks he prays. Back of the prayer he voices may be another prayer, unvoiced, but dominating his whole consciousness.

I met a man the other day whose son was in

desperate straits. This son, a lad of eighteen, had committed a crime, been convicted, and sentenced to the penitentiary. I shall never forget the father as he related the story,—the broken voice, the quivering lips, the furrowed face, the dark, pleading eyes, the trembling hands, a strong man bent down beneath the weight of staggering grief. How desperately, agonizingly, this father had prayed during his son's trial for an acquittal, and how passionately since then for a reprieve or pardon. But back, far back, of those prayers were other prayers,—prayers which he had been praying all his life and of which he was wholly unconscious.

I had heard the story from others. From the time when his son was the merest babe, this father had been immersed in business. He had had little time for his boy. There was not much companionship in that home, few exchanges of confidences, few mutual sympathies. The father's overmastering ambition was to become a man of wealth. Every day and every hour of the day for many years, he had bowed down in worship before the god, Success. And so, while he prayed in agony of spirit that his son might go free, that other prayer of his, the prayer he had prayed so passionately for a lifetime, was being answered. The answer was in material wealth, a dwarfed and com-

mercialized soul,—and the penitentiary for his son.

Jesus prayed in Gethsemane's garden, prayed repeatedly that the cup might pass from him. The cup did not pass from him; but his real prayer was answered. His all-consuming prayer was that he might bring into the heart of humanity an abundance of life. He prayed as few people ever think of praying. And, to this passionate prayer of his, he added these very significant words,—words which, all too often, the Christian forgets to add: "Nevertheless, not my will but thine be done."

Calvary's Cross was the real and triumphant answer to the deepest prayer the Master ever prayed, a more glorious answer, doubtless, than even he had ever imagined. For Calvary gave to the world the world's supreme demonstration of the power of love to bear all things, to believe all things, to hope all things, and to endure all things. Calvary made forever authoritative the teachings of Jesus. Calvary gave to mankind a Christ. Without Calvary, with its profound revelations, there would have been no Christ.

All people pray and all prayers are answered. And they are answered not by any changed attitude on the part of God. *God's attitude can never change. The course he follows is unalterable.*

The prayers of the unrighteous are answered in the penalties prescribed for the violation of his spiritual laws. The prayers of the righteous are answered in the rewards prescribed for conformity to his spiritual laws.

GOD HAS NO CHOICE. Every prayer that is being prayed today is *already* answered. Every prayer that ever will be prayed is *already* answered,—answered in the operation of the spiritual laws enacted by God for the governance of humanity. These laws hold the answer to every prayer. A recognition of this fact would revolutionize our praying. We call ourselves “Christians” but many of the prayers we pray are pagan.

We ask of God the impossible, and then mourn because the impossible is not granted. In many instances, we plead with God to do for us what he has made us capable of doing for ourselves. Our voiced petitions, oftentimes, do not represent the fundamental purpose of our lives. We expect God to change when we are the ones to change. Cheap prayers for cheap ends,—many of these voiced prayers of ours. Because we have the power of choice, we think God, too, must have the power of choice. We insist, unconsciously, in fashioning our God in our own weak spiritual image instead of in our spiritual image at its best.

All people pray and all prayers are answered.

Not just the voiced petition, but the unalterable purpose that dominates, is a person's real prayer.

The character of one's prayer is the character of one's life. The two are inseparable.

That is how the younger generation is coming to conceive of prayer. And that is why the younger generation is, consciously, a praying generation. Its voiced prayers may not be as numerous as the voiced prayers of youth in other days, but its real and conscious prayers are just as numerous—possibly more numerous.

No prayer can be effectual that does not express the fundamental purpose and passion of the soul.

Every prayer is effectual that does express the fundamental purpose and passion of the soul.

**THE PRAYER I PRAY IS THE LIFE I LIVE.**

## XII

### WHAT IS FUNDAMENTAL?

“WHAT’S the most popular men’s organization in your university?” I inquired of a young friend of mine home on vacation.

“The atheist’s club,” came the prompt reply.

“You a member?”

“Yes, charter member. We organized a couple of years ago.”

“What’s the idea?”

“Well, you see, a lot of us couldn’t get the sort of stuff we wanted in the churches; so we had to get up a club of our own.”

“What kind of stuff do you want?”

“Real, live, up-to-date stuff. Something in line with modern thought.”

“How many members has this club of yours?”

“About fifty or sixty.”

“And all atheists?”

“Well, hardly. The fact is, I haven’t been able to detect any real atheists.”

“That’s queer. An atheist’s club without any real atheists?”

"I'll admit the name is rather misleading. But it has a jolt in it. We take in everybody afflicted with *theologitis*."

"*Theologitis?*"

"Yes, that's a kind of campus disease. Attacks everybody who gets the modern scientific point of view."

"I see. And what do you discuss mostly?"

"The Bible. More particularly, the New Testament. And more particularly still, the sayings of Jesus."

"Reached any very definite conclusions?"

"Yes, sir, we have. We've reached some almost unanimous conclusions. We've concluded that Jesus is the most misrepresented man in history, that the theology of the churches is no criterion by which to judge him, and that we can accept his teachings and program without any reservations whatsoever. But we can't and won't swear to a lot of creeds in which we don't believe. We're after the *fundamentals*."

I am setting down this conversation merely as an indication of the drift of things. The reader may take it for what it is worth.

Another incident. A few years ago, I had a most interesting and refreshing experience. A half dozen young people had met for a debate—no

audience; just these six young people. I was invited to listen in. It proved to be a most profitable evening. The subject debated was: "Fundamentalism *vs.* Modernism." Rather an astounding question for young people just out of their teens—another indication of the interest the younger generation is taking in current religious issues.

I wish the whole Christian church might have listened in. The debate waxed hot and furious for a couple of hours. When it was over, these six young people, much to their surprise, found themselves in substantial agreement. Their differences were only incidental. I couldn't help thinking that if Christian people everywhere were to engage in the same kind of forensics, the results might be the same—agreements instead of differences.

The younger generation is hearing a good deal these days about the fundamentals of the Christian religion. It is one of the most hopeful signs of the times. Discussion is the way out of the woods. And religion is being discussed. Religion has the front pages in our newspapers. Religion is talked in the club and on the street. Every popular magazine must make good its claims to popularity by printing an occasional article on religion. Flaring headlines grip the attention of people who had well-nigh forgotten that religion is still a vital force

in the modern world of thought and action. The impression made upon many minds seems to be that certain fundamentals which until now have been accepted by everybody, are being challenged; that, somehow, the whole body of Christian truth is being assailed by enemies disguised as friends; that something really calamitous to the religion of Jesus is most assuredly impending.

For a few years now, two words have been in the limelight—"Fundamentalist" and "Modernist." Both words are misleading. "Fundamentalist" implies that a certain group has the right to decide, for all really Christian people, what is fundamental—manifestly an impossible presumption. "Modernist" implies that another group is endeavoring to propagate a brand-new gospel radically different from the old. Both terms result in confusion.

Among the fundamentals which Fundamentalists enumerate, the most outstanding are: belief in an infallible Bible; belief in the Virgin Birth; belief in the doctrine of the atonement; belief in an actual physical resurrection; and belief in the second coming of Christ.

The younger generation can see nothing fundamental in any of these dogmas. If refusal to assent to them is sufficient grounds for excommuni-

cation, then the younger generation stands ready to be excommunicated.

Condemn this attitude, if you will. Call it egotistical and defiant. Say that youth has yet a great many lessons to learn and will one day repent its folly. Declare that the younger generation is not as spiritually inclined as youth in former generations. Lament the passing of the old days and coming of the new. Explain the situation as you will. You do not thereby alter one iota the real facts in the case.

Youth has its convictions and these convictions are the inevitable product of an age of science and democracy. It can no more renounce its convictions than the leopard can change its spots. Its problem just now is to find a way of fitting these convictions into a faith which, however it may differ from the faith of the past, will be essentially Christian. And youth is confident the thing can be done.

It sees, or thinks it sees, where both Fundamentalist and Modernist are standing on common ground so far as the REAL issues are concerned. Their differences are largely in mental categories and in phraseology. Back of these mental categories and back of this phraseology, are the abiding realities. And what youth is after are the abiding realities.

Take the first "fundamental"—an infallible Bible. Both Fundamentalist and Modernist believe in an infallible Bible; but the Fundamentalist is thinking of "verbal" infallibility, while the Modernist is thinking of "spiritual" infallibility. Both are firm believers in the *spiritual authority* of the Bible. It is only when it comes to a literal interpretation of the Bible that they part company. But isn't the *spiritual authority* of the Bible the only thing that really matters? The Fundamentalist finds his conviction of spiritual authority in a dogma. The Modernist finds his in the unchallengeable and reproducible experiences which the Bible records. But both find spiritual authority. And that is the main thing.

The second item has to do with the divinity of Jesus. Both Fundamentalist and Modernist believe in the divinity of Jesus. But the Fundamentalist declares emphatically, "You cannot believe in the divinity of Jesus unless you believe in the deity of Jesus; that is to say, unless you accept the dogma of the Virgin Birth." The Modernist, on the other hand, declares just as emphatically, "The divinity of Jesus has nothing whatever to do with the deity of Jesus. Deity is one thing and divinity is quite another thing. The spiritual authority of Jesus is not dependent upon the manner of his birth. That spiritual authority is to be

found in his life, his character, his spirit, and his teachings.” The Fundamentalist finds his evidence of the divinity of Jesus in a dogma. The Modernist finds his in personal spiritual achievement. But both believe in the divinity of Jesus. And that is the main thing.

Now, as to the third so-called fundamental, the doctrine of the atonement. Both Fundamentalist and Modernist are agreed as to the efficacy of the life and death of Jesus. Here is the great common ground. But the Fundamentalist says, “Jesus’ death on the cross is not efficacious unless, by his death, he made atonement for the sins of humanity.” The Modernist replies, “Jesus’ death on the cross is efficacious because without that agonizing death and its profound revelations—revelations which only the extremest sufferings have power to make—the world would not have had its Christ. The cross revealed, as nothing else could have revealed, the godlikeness of Jesus.” The Fundamentalist finds his supreme witness to the efficacy of Jesus’ death in a dogma. The Modernist finds his in a mighty revelation of character. But both believe in the efficacy of Jesus’ death. And that is the main thing.

When it comes to the fourth item, the Fundamentalist and the Modernist are again in sub-

stantial agreement so far as abiding realities are concerned. Both believe in the resurrection of Jesus—in the continued life of Jesus after his crucifixion. But the Fundamentalist declares, "You cannot believe that Jesus actually lives in the lives of men today unless you believe in a physical resurrection. To talk about a spiritual resurrection is merely dodging the issue." The Modernist, in turn, contends that "the resurrection of Jesus is infinitely more meaningful when conceived of in terms of the spiritual alone." What concerns him is the undeniable presence and power of Jesus in the whole varied life of humanity. The Fundamentalist finds the proof of Jesus' resurrection in a dogma. The Modernist finds it in multitudes of transfigured lives and in a civilization outreaching in humanitarian achievements all other civilizations. But both believe in the actual spiritual existence of Jesus. And that is the main thing.

And, finally, both Fundamentalist and Modernist are on common ground as regards the fifth and last item—the second coming of Christ. Both believe in the second coming; only the Fundamentalist insists that the second coming is still a future event, while the Modernist insists just as insistently that it is a present reality. The Fundamentalist stakes his belief in a dogma. The

Modernist stakes his belief on what is taking place at the present time in the hearts of men and women the world around—in the hopes and ideals and aspirations that are lifting people up into new realms of experience, in the new consciousness which compels dissatisfaction with even the finest achievements of the past, in the growing response mankind is making to the superb challenges of a new era. But both Fundamentalist and Modernist agree as to the actual presence of Jesus in the world of to-day. And that is the main thing.

Here is the chief difference between the two, as the younger generation sees it—the difference which gives rise to all other differences; the Fundamentalist, unconsciously no doubt, declares that there must be a literal, physical or material basis for every spiritual truth, while the Modernist contends that the spiritual may be quite independent of the physical; that the supreme mission of Jesus was to get people to think and to live in terms of the spiritual; that it is not so much the letter as the spirit of the law that counts, not so much the intellectual attitude of men as the spiritual passion of men.

The younger generation, of course, takes the Modernist's point of view. It cannot do otherwise. It is beginning to see, back of this whole Funda-

mentalist-Modernist controversy, the great common ground in religion, those abiding realities which after all are the only issues that really count, the imperishable convictions which are deep-rooted in the soul of Christendom.

And it wonders how soon Fundamentalist and Modernist will see the same thing.

How soon the real religion of Jesus will receive the consideration it ought to have.

How soon Fundamentalist and Modernist will quit arguing over non-essentials and declare unitedly to the younger generation that, whatever one's intellectual attitude on any of the dogmas of the church may be, "*the Christian is the person who honestly tries to live out the spirit and the teachings of Jesus. Nothing more. Nothing less.*"

## XIII

### THE FAITH OF THE YOUNGER GENERATION

THE younger generation is coming through. No question about that. To be sure, vast numbers are still badly befuddled and befogged. Their night continues black and ominous. The way ahead is a tangled maze. But some have reached the stage of hope; some, of glad assurance. They have laid hold upon a workable and satisfactory faith. Others are on the way. Everywhere, the light is breaking.

And what is this new faith of theirs?

Well, it is a living, adventurous faith, immeasurably more wonderful and profound than the faith they have been compelled to abandon. Its advantages over the old faith are beyond computation; for this new faith, instead of being inherited, is a personally thought-out and personally constructed faith. Therefore, a faith secure and dependable.

It is a faith untroubled by doubts and fears and confusion. These are gone forever. The younger generation has succeeded in breaking through one

theological and traditional veneer after another to the actual, living Man of Nazareth.

It is a faith from which all inconsistencies have vanished and are forever barred; independent of antiquated creeds and doctrines and dogmas; freed from the irksome necessity of attempting to reconcile irreconcilables, to adjust unadjustables, to explain unexplainables, or to believe in manifest impossibilities.

It is a faith that honors Jesus by making him *personally* responsible for the achievement of his own godlike character.

It is a faith that glorifies humanity by placing on human life increasing values and by finding somewhat of the spirit of God in even the most mistaken, misguided and forsaken soul.

It is a faith that magnifies God by putting him infinitely above and beyond the reach of those debasing passions that afflict the race of men and by ascribing to him attributes that shall really make him God to doubting millions in our world today.

It is a faith that feels and thinks in terms of God as a REALIZED presence; whose power and glory are revealed in the heavens above and in the earth beneath; whose voices call out of the hills and the valleys, out of the forest and the

stream, out of the great silences of nature and those other greater silences of the soul; whose breath is the fragrance of the rose, the tang of the sea, the spice of the pine and the hemlock; whose spirit burns in every wayside bush for him who has eyes to see, and whose messages are clearly written in even the commonest of common things for him who has a heart to understand; who lives and moves and has his being in the whole complex, varied life of humanity; in whom alone humanity finds the glorious completion of its finest hopes and noblest adventures; who spoke to men in olden times by the inspiration of his spirit and who, by the inspiration of his spirit, speaks to mankind today in a language richer and more meaningful than the language of the past; who cares and cares infinitely for the very least among the sons of men; whose nature has in it no place for hatred and revenge; whose transfiguring and redeeming love is forever fashioning the character of the race into something of greater stature and finer mould than humanity in ages gone had ever dreamed.

Marvelous and glorious and consuming, this faith of the younger generation, which makes the whole universe vocal with the revelations of the Almighty and saturates it through and through with his contagious presence.

What shall I believe? That is one of life's constantly recurring questions. One never gets away from it. And, what is more, one never wants to get away from it.

The progressive business man today holds views on business radically different from the business views of his forefathers. The professional man nowhere insists on strict adherence to the professional beliefs of former generations. Every person in line with the spirit of progress is eager to get hold of bigger facts and to alter accordingly the beliefs he has formerly held. Progress means change and change calls for readjustments, the discarding of inadequate beliefs and the taking on of beliefs that in some small way at least will better meet the emergencies of the present. Where there is no change, there is no progress.

Now science—"knowledge"—is only another word for progress. Until comparatively recent times, say the beginning of the renaissance, men were not thinking in terms of progress. They were thinking in terms of a static universe. Naturally, this is a hard idea for any modern to grasp. But so it was. The idea of "progress" is of rather recent origin. It dates back only a few brief centuries. But in these few centuries its achievements have been amazing.

Science rejoices in the necessity of change. Take the science of medicine, for instance. No science within the last fifty or one hundred years has undergone more radical and revolutionary changes. Scarcely any disease receives today the same treatment it received a century ago. And a century hence even greater progress is almost sure to be registered. Medical science knows in part and prophesies in part; but it realizes that fullness of knowledge is a long way from actual achievement. It is always open to change, welcomes change and, in the face of convincing evidence, is glad to abandon the old for the new.

The same is true of the natural sciences. The rapidly enlarging knowledge of mankind has given us a new heaven and a new earth. We cannot think, we ought not to think, precisely as former generations thought. Instead of a universe run in accordance with the whims and caprices of an erratic, vacillating deity, we now have a universe run in accordance with the unalterable laws of an unchanging God. And that is a tremendous gain.

This newer knowledge has revolutionized our whole way of thinking, given us order for chaos, harmony for discord, security for instability, and peace for fear. A new heaven and a new earth! Astronomy has multiplied for us the heavenly

bodies. Geology has read and interpreted the messages of the rocks, staggered our imagination with its tales of æons. Chemistry has acquainted us with a universe which, for even the most learned of the Middle Ages, had literally no existence. Little by little, every branch of science has been crowding back old horizons and giving us glimpses of new and enchanting worlds.

As in the past, so now, people know in part and prophesy in part; but the part which is known is greater, while the part which is prophesied is bigger and more alluring. An expanding knowledge ushers us into a new world—more beautiful, more wonderful, and more conscious of a God at the center of things. Old beliefs which have served their day and generation go, new beliefs come on with their promises and their challenges. Change is everywhere. And everybody rejoices in it, EXCEPT—except where religion is concerned.

EXCEPT WHERE RELIGION IS CONCERNED. Then there is halting and balking and hemming and coughing and sidestepping. Just why, nobody quite knows. But it's a fact. Hosts of people, thoroughly modern from a business or professional point of view, insist upon medievalizing or pre-medievalizing everything religious. Reason is thrown to the winds and emotionalism, uncon-

sciously camouflaged as piety, rules the day. In their spiritually paralyzed state, honest Christian people profess to believe that the old-time religion is good enough to serve all purposes.

But the old-time religion is not good enough to serve all purposes. It was nowhere near as good as it ought to have been. At best, it was only a far-away approach to the teachings of Jesus. And the religion of today is not good enough. Far from it. But, if we are progressing spiritually as we are most assuredly progressing intellectually and materially, it ought to be, in some respects, at least, a much nearer approach to the teachings of Jesus.

We are living in a larger world than the world of yesterday. And tomorrow we shall be living in a still larger world. Our religion ought, therefore, to be a correspondingly larger religion. It is not God's way, in any other realm of life, that the present should be shackled by the past. Nor is it God's way, as respects religion, that the present should be shackled by the past. God's way is the way of progress. Progress is the hope of mankind. Without it, the greater kingdom of the Christ becomes an idle dream and all talk about a better world mere foolish mutterings.

What, then, shall I most surely believe? How am I to know what is the exact truth? These are

questions troubling multitudes of people who honestly long for a secure anchorage. They are questions which the younger generation is struggling to answer.

They are big questions. Neither can be answered by cataloguing groups of things to be believed, and other groups of things not to be believed. Belief is a changing quantity. Doctrines perfectly satisfactory yesterday are not at all satisfactory today; doctrines satisfactory today will not be at all satisfactory tomorrow. A larger soul will demand larger beliefs. Growth is one of the unchanging laws of God.

Belief is a matter of growth. "When I was a child I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things." Here is a principle which ought to govern all religious thinking. Applying this principle, the progressive Christian will naturally modify or abandon one doctrinal belief after another and all the time will find himself getting closer and closer to the real heart of the teachings of Jesus.

The question of what one is to believe is a question of one's mental and spiritual development. As naturally as the dead leaves fall from the trees in autumn, and as naturally as the living green

comes back into these same trees in the springtime, will the beliefs one has outlived leave him to be supplanted by other beliefs, throbbing with new life and energy. Beliefs are bound to change constantly, as they ought to change. Let them change, rejoice when the change comes, thank God for every new ray of light that breaks, welcome truth and accept it confidently, however many traditions it may override; for in accepting truth one is accepting God. That is the philosophy of the younger generation.

But what definite things shall I believe? What makes up the faith of the younger generation? After throwing overboard so many creeds and dogmas, what is left to believe? Just this—everything essential. The younger generation has not sacrificed, and refuses to sacrifice, anything essential to the religion of Jesus. It has simply rid itself of a lot of theological rubbish and come down to bed-rock foundations.

*The younger generation believes in God,* believes with all its heart and soul and mind. It can't help believing. It used to find it difficult to believe in the God of the fathers,—that God of the early Old Testament tempered somewhat by the God of the New.

A strange God, this God of the fathers. There

were so many things about him that required explanation, so much of his conduct for which one had to apologize, so many apparent flaws in his character, so many inconsistencies in his attitude toward men; he acted in haste oftentimes, only to repent when he had calmed down a bit; he was so jealous and vindictive and revengeful; one was not especially attracted to him.

If only the God of Jesus might all through these nineteen centuries have been the God of Christendom. But religionists who sat in the seats of the mighty would not have it that way. It was not altogether their fault. They had not developed the spiritual perception to grasp Jesus' conception of God. And so they perpetuated the God of the Old Testament, the war-lord of ancient Israel; and this war-lord has come striding right down into the twentieth century. In fact, a few years ago, he came near upsetting our whole civilization. And unless we can rid our minds of this war-lord conception, our civilization is bound to be upset time and again. The war-lord of ancient Israel served his day and generation. He is not sufficient to the times that now are. Only the God of Jesus will suffice.

The younger generation insists on getting back to the God of Jesus. That is the burden of its

message and the passion of its soul. Its God is a more wonderful God than ever the God of its former faith. He is *imminent*, not transcendent; here, not just off somewhere in the regions beyond; present in everything, not in just some things; a God of law and order, not a God of chaos and caprice. His attributes are the noblest man can conceive. And he is an approachable God, this God of the younger generation. One actually wants to be in his presence. Communion with him is one of the greatest thrills of life.

*And the younger generation believes in Jesus,* believes in him as never before it could believe. It just can't help believing in him. It had serious difficulties trying to believe in the miracle-working Jesus of the gospels and of the dogmas. But these difficulties have all vanished. The Christ of the younger generation is not a godlike magician who demonstrates his power by turning water into wine, walking on the surface of the sea, feeding multitudes with a few loaves and fishes, raising the dead, and doing all sorts of miraculous things. The worker of physical miracles has given way to the worker of spiritual miracles. In the ever-deepening consciousness of humanity, the religion of Jesus is coming to rest upon a spiritual rather than upon a physical foundation.

The Christ of the younger generation is a man-Christ who developed qualities so godlike that men came to think of him as God. He was gifted, doubtless, as no other man has ever been gifted, with spiritual endowments, but it was only by the most rigorous discipline that he achieved his divinity. This man-Christ—and just because he was a man and not a God—is for all men an illustration and demonstration of the potential godlikeness of human nature. In one degree or another, everyone may achieve somewhat of his divinity—his godlikeness.

*And the younger generation believes in man.* Its new faith compels it to believe in man for this new faith is the faith of Jesus. It believes that every soul is created in the spiritual image of God, and that the possibilities of every soul are endless. It wonders at those old-time doctrines—no longer the doctrines even of “orthodox” Christendom—of original sin and total depravity, of foreordination and predestination, all of which debased human nature. And it wonders, too, why the church of today doesn’t find more of godlikeness in men. It sees Jesus mingling with people whom religionists thought of as the scum of society, the down-and-outers, the social riff-raff, and finding God in the soul of every one of them. And it wonders at the

smugness and exclusiveness of so many people of today who profess to be his followers. In the mind of the younger generation, smugness and exclusiveness have nothing in common with the religion of Jesus.

*The younger generation believes in "salvation," but not in the cheaply bought salvation of blood atonement. It believes in salvation by character. And it finds the ideal character fully revealed in Jesus. It does not separate people into two classes, the "saved" and the "lost." It thinks rather of all people as in the process of being saved or lost, saved or lost according to the character they are building. It does not believe that "Jesus paid it all"; it believes that every person pays at some time or other the penalties of his own wrong doing; that nobody, not even the Christ, can pay these penalties for him. It demands justice—even in religion.*

*The younger generation believes in its own God-given potentialities. It refuses to think of any individual as "a poor worm of the dust." It finds in the profoundest depths of human nature what it is pleased to regard as the spirit of the Eternal. It is conscious of a godwardness which is irresistible. It doesn't try to explain everything; it just tries to use common-sense. Reason has its*

very definite limitations. The regions of faith outreach by far the regions of knowledge.

It believes that God has given to every person a soul worth-while, that every soul is a bundle of undeveloped powers and resources, and that the building of a greater soul is the big business of life.

*And, finally, the younger generation believes in the spiritual authority of the Bible.* It finds supreme spiritual authority in the character and teachings of Jesus. What is more, spiritual authority is the only kind of authority it expects to find in the Bible. It refuses to judge the Book as other than a Book of Religion. But as a Book of Religion, it finds the Bible priceless—a compendium of some of the richest and ripest spiritual experiences of men as men have battled their way on to God, a prophecy of the limitless reaches and possibilities of human nature.

There are other items in the faith of the younger generation, but these are the main items. These are the items with which the younger generation just now is primarily concerned and which it wants to hear discussed. To this kind of faith, it is ready to subscribe. In this kind of faith it is ready to live and die.

## XIV

### WHO IS A CHRISTIAN?

MANY times, during the past few years, my thoughts have wandered back to a little, white country chapel and to a simple, kindly, dignified man looking down, as it seemed to me, into the very soul of youth, and saying: "*The Christian is the person who honestly tries to live out the spirit and the teachings of Jesus. Nothing more. Nothing less.*"

When that sentence first fell upon my ears, I had been for nearly two years in a state of utter bewilderment. Those magic words swept every rankling doubt completely out of my soul. They came to me as a revelation, the flash of truth for which I had long been waiting. And how the universe did change in that cataclysmic moment! All the way home, the hills kept shouting, "Nothing more. Nothing less." The birds joined in a big chorus of rejoicing for my special benefit and sang, "Nothing more. Nothing less." Even the brook where we stopped for a wayside lunch babbled out in its clear brook-language, "Nothing more. Nothing less."

I have never had so many perilous difficulties cleared away at a single stroke.

"Nothing more. Nothing less." Strange that I hadn't thought of it before. Strange, as I look back over these few brief years, that I had to be told this very simple and self-evident truth. And stranger still that I had to leave the lecture-halls of a great university for a pew in a country chapel to be set right on questions that had caused me no end of anguish.

But the minister of that country chapel requires a word of explanation. One glance into his gracious, benevolent, highly intellectual face, crowned with great shocks of snow-white hair, lined with deep furrows which love must have plowed and with the light of God upon it, was enough to leave with one the indelible impression that here was a most unusual character.

I once attended a lecture given by a man whose personality was so captivating as to make me feel that I would gladly have paid the price of admission just to sit there and look into his face even had he not uttered a syllable. I felt precisely that way about Robert Robinson. His very presence was a sermon and a benediction. He dealt with the big things of life; and in such a simple, compelling way that a child might understand. The ground

whereon he stood seemed holy ground; and hundreds, like myself, will ever hold him in grateful memory as a glorious incarnation of the Christ-spirit.

Robert Robinson was no ordinary clergyman. His training had been unusual. American-born and bred, and educated in American universities, he had found numerous opportunities for old-world contacts. His was the international mind and the international soul. He had sat at the feet of some of the most renowned scholars of his day. He had won the highest scholastic honors. And always he had done his own thinking. That was characteristic of Robert Robinson. Invariably, he did his own thinking.

Ready at last for the ministry, he accepted a call to an obscure village church; but he was not long to remain in obscurity. One of the outstanding university churches in America soon recognized his stately qualities of mind and soul. Robinson became its minister. A decade later, another university church and then still another prevailed upon him to accept their urgent calls. University centers always laid first claim to Robert Robinson.

For thirty years, he was the honored and beloved spiritual counselor of scholars, but not of scholars alone. His mission went deeper than that. He was

likewise the honored and beloved spiritual counselor of hosts of students who needed desperately his illuminating and irresistible message.

Then all unexpectedly something happened. His arduous labors began to tell on him. Sleepless nights followed torturous days. Specialists advised a rest. His people sent him off on a trip around the world. But the old-time strength did not return. The snapped nerves would not be mended. The great heart refused to respond to the urgent call of an aggressive soul. Finally, after repeated attempts to "come back," this man, whose pulpit, for three decades, had been a throne of power, accepted a call to a country church, and, in the service of that church, spent the remaining years of his life.

But possibly, in what seemed direst tragedy, God was only magnifying Robert Robinson's mission; for, out of that country church, went a number of young men to enter the Christian ministry and several young women to tell on foreign fields the story of the glorious gospel of the Christ. God works in mysterious ways his wonders to perform.

*"The Christian is the person who honestly tries to live out the spirit and the teachings of Jesus. Nothing more. Nothing less."*

Why haven't all the clergymen of America been saying that throughout this whole turbulent and

mystifying period of transition? Why haven't they been giving this final answer to destructive critics? Why haven't they, in these few, telling words, been reconstructing the faith of thousands? Multitudes of the younger generation have reached the desperate point where they need exactly that kind of counsel, and where that kind of counsel would clear everything up. But it's so difficult to say the simple thing. The art of simplicity is one of the finest of the fine arts. Jesus was master of the art. So was Lincoln. And so was Robert Robinson.

*"The Christian is the person who honestly tries to live out the spirit and the teachings of Jesus. Nothing more. Nothing less."*

How I would have welcomed a statement like that during those two shattering years under Professor Markham. And how scores of other intellectually and spiritually twisted students would have welcomed it. At least a full dozen young fellows I know would be in the Christian ministry today, instead of in business or law or engineering, had some Robert Robinson been on hand. What opportunities confronted those ministers in that university center to straighten out the mental tangles and to set brave spirits free. But tradition ruled. Literalism refused any and all concessions.

Blind adherence to dogma made utterly impossible any real and adequate appreciation of the crisis confronting the younger generation.

Aren't the churches of America going to see it? Aren't the clergy of America going to sense the real situation?

If not the church and the clergy, then what institution and what persons are to deal with the problems uppermost, just now, in the mind of the younger generation? Youth must have some valiant assistance. It is honestly and inevitably confused. And this confusion continues to work its dire and needless havoc.

O for a voice in every American pulpit like the voice of Robert Robinson, a message out of a great heart to the throbbing heart of humanity, words of wisdom whose meaning even the humblest and simplest might grasp, counsel that youth would accept with a shout of triumph!

Our generation needs the Christ. Our civilization cannot endure without the Christ. Isn't it possible to introduce the actual Jesus of Nazareth to this modern world? Isn't it possible to do away with all this doctrinal camouflage and to look for once into the real heart of things? Isn't it possible to drive into the consciousness of all people, this very evident fact, that, whatever one's the-

ology, or whatever one's creeds, or whatever one's intellectual attitude on any question, "*The Christian is the person who honestly tries to live out the spirit and the teachings of Jesus. Nothing more. Nothing less?*" And that the person who doesn't try to live out the spirit and the teachings of Jesus, no matter what his creeds, and doctrines, and church connections, IS NOT A CHRISTIAN?

Intellectual honesty and moral courage on the part of the church and its clergy are first essentials if the present critical situation is to be met successfully. There are enough ministers in this land who think as Robert Robinson thought to turn the scales if they would only speak out. But traditionalism continues its tyrannical rule. The experience of those who have spoken out is a defiant warning of doom to those who would like to speak out. And so diplomacy takes the place of downright honesty; side-stepping of a courageous facing of facts; and platitudes of an uncompromising presentation of convictions.

How soon is Christendom to be aroused from its long and perilous slumber? If youthless churches will not provide the necessary jolts, what will? What sort of catastrophic happenings are required to get the clergy to see and to face the situation as it really is? When is this long and

bewildering night of old-world theology to come to an end and the light of a new-world spirituality to dawn? Youth wonders, and its wonderment increases with the passing of the years.

We talk about our world-problems. We ask ourselves how, in the presence of the mighty war-lord, our civilization is to be saved and made secure. We speculate on the outcome of our industrial warfare, upon our dire social problems, upon our corrupt politics, upon any number of perplexing questions. We pray for the coming of the day of universal peace and good will. But, instead of getting to the very heart of the religion of Jesus, a large section of the church preaches an ancient, thread-bare, prescientific and irrational theology, forces the younger generation out of the church, and then makes all sorts of frantic and futile efforts to stem the onrushing tide of indifference and skepticism. It acts as if God were surely doomed to ultimate defeat.

And all the time, the chained and manacled Christ awaits the word that will strike off his galling fetters and release him to humanity. He waits in agony of spirit for dauntless men, speaking as his ambassadors, to disclose him to the world as he really is. He waits for the coming of a new order of clergy who, like the prophets of old, shall

be nobly careless of their own fortunes and their own fate, and speak out what they most surely believe.

These words in closing. I owe to Robert Robinson a debt of everlasting gratitude. I owe it to him and to the younger generation to reproduce as accurately as possible the indelible impression which his living, thrilling words made on me. This, I have endeavored to do. Even at best, much is lacking. The magnetic personality of this modern-day prophet of righteousness; the contagious passion which saturated his measured utterances; that strange, spiritual illumination of the countenance; the quickening sense of being in the intimate presence of one who had walked with God and learned of him—all this, I must leave to the reader's imagination.

But the heart of his message, I would blaze before the world in characters of living light: "**THE CHRISTIAN IS THE PERSON WHO HONESTLY TRIES TO LIVE OUT THE SPIRIT AND THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS. NOTHING MORE. NOTHING LESS.**"

That is the evangel of the new day, the trumpet call to the younger generation—not Simon-pure intellectuality, but spirituality; not blind adherence to dogmas, but unswerving allegiance to convictions; not drudging slaves of an ecclesiastical

hierarchy, but free-born in Christ who know the meaning of a freedom that is really free.

The times are ripe. Multitudes are in a receptive frame of mind and spirit. Eager hosts are struggling to work their way out of a tangled maze of doubts and fears and questionings. Youth is on tip-toe to take up the cause of the adventurous Christ and to carry it on to yet greater triumphs. Never were times like these.

What shall be done about it?

The younger generation awaits the jury's verdict.





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